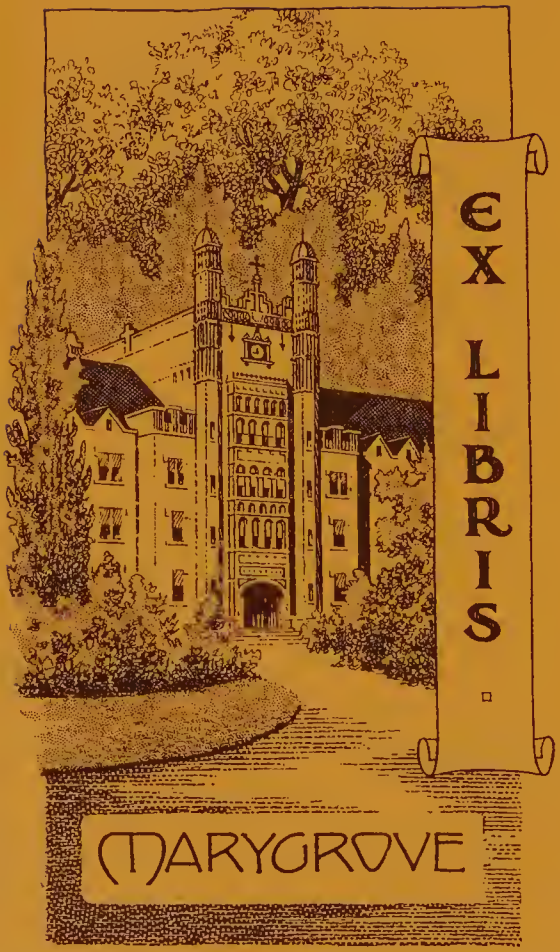
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SHELBURNE ESSAYS

FIFTH SERIES

Shelburne Essays

FIFTH SERIES

By Paul Elmer More

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SHELBURNE ESSAYS

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THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

It is true, as others have already pointed out, that Dr. Mackail in reëditing his volume of *Select Epigrams*[1] has failed to take advantage of the labours of certain German scholars during the intervening sixteen years,[2] and has thus missed the proper historical perspective in his Introduction. And this is regrettable, since such omissions leave the reader with a feeling of uneasiness even where the purpose of a book makes the neglected points of slight significance. As a matter of fact, Dr. Mackail's volume is one of the few really excellent works of English (or, one may add, Continental) scholarship dealing with

[1] *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*, edited with revised text, translation, introduction, and notes, by J. W. Mackail, professor of poetry in the University of Oxford. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906. The first edition appeared in 1890.

[2] The most important work has been done by R. Reitzenstein, whose *Epigramm und Skolion* (Giessen, 1893) I have drawn upon in this essay.

the classics as a human production. Here in brief compass, and with suitable aids to comprehension, one has the substance of a whole fascinating literature. Just to have rendered the epigrams so closely, yet with such unfailing charm, was a notable achievement. Still more signal is the accuracy with which he has selected what was essential in the great bulk of traditional matter, so as to leave in the end the impression of something closed and complete in itself. Exigencies of modern taste compelled him to omit the more characteristic epigrams of Strato's *Musa Puerilis*, as well as the too passionate and luxuriant numbers of Rufinus, which might seem to form an integral part of the Anthology; but a little reflection will show that these ardours of the flesh are almost as foreign to the heart of that literature as would be the more classical elevation of mind. If he has erred, it has been in the pardonable direction of hospitality. It would be hard to blame the maker of any anthology for including the perfect epitaphs of Simonides, and one can understand the temptation which led him to increase the number of these in his new edition. Yet I am not sure whether the artistic harmony of the book is not a little marred by such lines as these *On the Defenders of Tegea:*

> Through these men's valour the smoke of the burning of wide-floored Tegea went not up to heaven, who chose to leave the city glad and free to their children, and themselves to die in the forefront of battle;

whether, if anything were to be added to the section of *Epitaphs*, that town of Arcady could not have furnished a more fitting example in the verses by its poetess, Anyte :

No bridal chamber for thee, nor pride of marriage—but above this marble tomb thy mother has raised a virgin figure, having thy stature and form, O Thersis ; so can she speak to thee, even dead.

For it cannot be stated too strongly that the real Anthology is something far removed from the heroic poetry of Greece, something in which the note of the fifth century sounds as a sharp intrusion. Echoes of the older poets there are, of course —Homeric epithets and clear reminiscences of Lesbos and Teos. And, strange as it may seem, Plato on one of his sides comes closer to the spirit of the Anthology than does any other of the great writers, so that the transition from the opening scenes of the *Phædrus* to some of the epigrams in Dr. Mackail's section of *Nature* demands but a slight readjustment of the mind. Thus, when Socrates and his ardent young friend come to the plane-tree overhanging the Ilissus, they sit down to talk, and Socrates says :

A fair and shady resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. There is the lofty and spreading plane-tree, and the agnus castus high and clustering, in the fullest blossom and the greatest fragrance ; and the stream which flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cold to the feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs;

moreover, there is a sweet breeze, and the grasshoppers chirrup; and the greatest charm of all is the grass like a pillow gently sloping to the head.

If anything could save the authenticity of the epigrams attributed to Plato, it would be the similarity of tone here and in his quatrain of the Anthology beginning: "Sit down by this high-foliaged voiceful pine." Or compare the scene of the *Phædrus* with this longer idyl of some unknown poet:

Here fling thyself down on the grassy meadow, O traveller, and rest thy relaxed limbs from painful weariness; since here also, as thou listenest to the cicalas' tune, the stone-pine trembling in the wafts of the west wind will lull thee, and the shepherd on the mountains piping at noon nigh the spring under a copse of leafy plane; so escaping the ardours of the autumnal dogstar thou wilt cross the height to-morrow; trust this good counsel that Pan gives thee.

With the exception of that tell-tale word *weariness*, Socrates might have uttered these words on that memorable day when he and his companion walked together by the stream of Attica.

The resemblance is but momentary, of course, and the graceful dallying of Plato is the balancing of himself, so to speak, for a plunge into the depths. His conception of love and beauty that follows in this same dialogue is as widely remote from the human indulgence of the pseudo-Plato of the Epigrams as, to make another comparison, Eros, the subduer, of the true Anacreon is dif-

ferent from the mischievous boy-Eros of the Anacreontica These superficial resemblances merely serve to emphasise the contrast between the gravity (the σπουδαιότης one might say, had not the word been vulgarised since Matthew Arnold's time) of the genuine Greek literature, and the lightness, often triviality, of what supplanted it. For this fresh flowering of wit is not so much a continuation of the old schools of poetry, as a new *genre* sprung from the coalescing of two modes of expression very characteristic of Hellenic life, but hitherto kept in a subordinate place.

From an early date it had been the custom to enliven the symposium, or drinking part of the dinner, with the rivalry of song. There were regular rules for the sport. A subject was proposed, perhaps the lines of some well-known poet quoted, and then each man in turn had to display his ingenuity. Another form of verse adapted to the more religious needs of the people was the epigram, or actual inscription, whether it were the brief commemoration on stone of the dead, or some prayer or word of thanksgiving to the gods set up with a gift or statue in a temple. Great poets did not disdain to exercise their art in this way, and a few of the genuine epigrams of Simonides and his rivals from the fifth century are as perfect as any work of human wit can be. Brevity, dignity, and a certain rounded completeness were the essential qualities of such writing; and the

elegiac couplet soon proved itself the inevitable medium. At an early date collections of inscriptions were made, and the forger followed in the field. From publishing spurious verses under the name of Simonides or another, it was an easy step to turn the epigram into an avowed form of literary expression.

Meanwhile, this trick of composing imaginary inscriptions made its way to the banquet hall. It introduced a new kind of lure to name some one of the illustrious dead, and then call on each guest to compose a suitable epitaph; for death in those days, as always, had its poignant appeal for a reflective Epicureanism. "Drink, for once dead you never shall return," is a refrain as new as it is old; and love?—

> When I am gone, Cleobulus—for what avails? cast among the fire of young loves, I lie a brand in the ashes —I pray thee make the burial-urn drunk with wine ere thou lay it under earth, and write on it, "Love's gift to Death."

From such an example it is easy to see how the epitaph could merge with the erotic elegies which had been sung at the table. The two subjects flowed together naturally; and even where this did not occur, the peculiar form of the inscription imposed itself upon the elegy. From this contact came the epigram as we have it in the Anthology —a brief poem in elegiac metre, written for the most part in the closet, but with something of the

point and self-sufficiency of the actual engraving on stone, combined with the zest and flavour of the banquet. It might take the form of an epitaph ; it might, as the supposed accompaniment of a temple-gift, sum up some experience of life ; it might, as the inscription of a statue, invite to repose by the wayside ; again, freeing itself from these restrictions, it might merely philosophise on the vanity of things or play with the passions. It was distinctly a new *genre*, having well-defined rules and suited to the spirit of the disenchanted centuries after the political fall of Greece.

The beginning of the epigram as a recognised literary kind has been traced back to two poets, the founders of the Doric, or Peloponnesian, and the Ionian schools. Of the first of these, Anyte of Tegea, little is known. She was, apparently, a contemporary of Theocritus (the fact is important, considering the character of their inspiration), and about 300 B.C. published a book of epigrams which were much imitated in later ages. Meleager opens his garland of poets with the "many lilies of Anyte," and to another epigrammatist she was the "female Homer." There had existed for some time in Arcadia a school of bucolic poetry, largely, it may be supposed, of a popular sort ("soli cantare periti Arcades," says Virgil), in which the rustic gods, Pan and Hermes, and the nymphs played an important rôle. So far as is known, Anyte was the first to express this spirit of homely pastoral life in ele-

giac couplets for social usage. Only a handful of her poems have been preserved, but they are sufficient to show the exquisite transparency and delicate finish of her work. Some of them are on the humblest themes, such as this supposed inscription for a shepherd's crook, or pipe, or ivy cup:

> To bristly Pan and the Nymphs of the farm-yard, Theodotus, the shepherd, lays this gift under the crag, because they stayed him when very weary under the parching summer, holding out to him honey-sweet water in their hands.

Others are mottoes, actual or imaginary, for fountains and statues:

> I, Hermes, stand here by the windy orchard in the cross-ways nigh the grey sea-shore, giving rest on the way to wearied men; and the fountain wells forth cold stainless water;

or this, perhaps the most radiant of all the pictures in the Anthology:

> This is the Cyprian's ground, since it was her pleasure ever to look from land on the shining sea, that she may give fulfilment of their voyage to sailors; and around the deep trembles, gazing on her bright image.

(Was ever the beauty of the sea-born Aphrodite more magically conveyed?) These three epigrams Dr. Mackail gives in his selection. One wishes he could have made room for Anyte's pretty lines on the dead locust and cicada, or for one at least

of her pathetic epitaphs on young girls dying in their first loveliness—so much might have been granted to the poetess for her position.

The gods of the fields and the sea in these epigrams prevail over those of the cup. For the wanton muse of *Wein und Weib* we must turn to the Ionian Asclepiades of Samos, whose singing, according to Theocritus, was as high above his own as the locust surpasses a frog in sweetness. Others before him, we may believe, had reduced the love-elegy to the brevity and turn of an epigram, but he first, it appears, was conscious of the full powers of this banquet Muse. His themes were those that are so familiar to us in the erotic poets of Rome who copied the Alexandrine school. There is the lover at the closed door of his beloved, the *paraklausithyron*, which, in the imitation of Tibullus, contains one of the most romantic lines of Latin poetry: "En ego cum tenebris totâ vagor anxius urbe"; there is the appeal to the night-lamp, whose repetition continues down to the elegy of André Chénier:

> Et toi, lampe nocturne, astre cher à l'amour,
> Sur le marbre posée, ô toi! qui, jusqu'au jour,
> De ta prison de verre éclairais nos tendresses,
> C'est toi qui fus témoin de ses douces promesses.

The gist of it all is in two perfect quatrains of Asclepiades himself:

> Sweet is snow in summer for one athirst to drink, and sweet for sailors after winter to see the Crown of spring;

but most sweet when one cloak hides two lovers, and the praise of Love is told by both;

and,

Let us drink an unmixed draught of wine; dawn is an handbreath; are we waiting to see the bedtime lamp once again? Let us drink merrily; after no long time yet, O luckless one, we shall sleep through the long night. [The words of Catullus: "Nox est perpetua una dormienda."]

From these two singers of Arcadia and of Samos and, of course, from other contributory sources proceeded the inspiration of the great body of epigrammatic literature which continues well down into the Byzantine Empire. Some of the writers were poets of fame, such as Callimachus and Philetas; some hid their obscurity under the forged names of Plato or another; others were grammarians, or philosophers, or men of the world—courtiers, perhaps, who took this method of summing up, half-seriously and half-jocosely, their lessons of disillusion. Many came from Asia, and were in no true sense of the word Greeks at all. In the first century before Christ, one of these writers, Meleager, who was born at Gadara (Ramoth-Gilead) of Northern Palestine, made a selected anthology of this literature so far as it already existed, adding a number of elegiac quotations from the older classical poets. Successive editors altered and enlarged the collection, until the Anthology, as we now have it with its thousands of epigrams,

was formed in the late Middle Ages by scholars of Constantinople. The last shadowy name included is that of Cometas, called Chartularius, or Keeper of the Records, of the tenth century. None of his six epigrams possesses literary value, except the one beautiful pastoral couplet, in which, as Dr. Mackail says, "we seem to hear the very voice of ancient poetry bidding the world a lingering and reluctant farewell" :

Dear Pan, abide here, drawing the pipe over thy lips, for thou wilt find Echo on these sunny greens.

Naturally the work of so many men during so many centuries comprises a variety of styles and ways of looking at life ; yet the final impression, especially when so sympathetic a critic as Dr. Mackail has eliminated the superfluous, is singularly uniform. Beneath the ever-changing play of sentiment run two qualities, two ideas, that in their combination give the Anthology a peculiar flavour of its own—the sense of transitoriness and a certain indescribable kindliness or friendliness of spirit. There was in all these poets an unusual age-consciousness ; the glory of Greece was behind them, and they wrote in a sort of crepuscle, awaiting the night. The past is always an insistent reality with men of imagination ; its influence was incalculably strong in the most fervid periods of Greek creation ; but in the declining pagan world it was present in a way almost incomprehensible to us. To one sailing in the

Ægean Sea how many monuments of former greatness spoke on every coast—famous cities reduced to villages, proud States fallen into subserviency, memories of stirring battles. The temples were spoiled of their treasures, yet enough remained to show the nobility of an art now forever lost; the old plays were still produced on the stage, but they served only to mock the sterility of the present. These poets of the late Hellenic world were still in a way members of the ancient civilisation, they spoke the same language and worshipped, or named, the same gods; but what a gulf of impassable experience lay between them and their ancestors. It is not strange that the shadow of transitoriness enveloped all their thoughts. That feeling indeed is universal to mankind and is never long absent from poetry, but in the Anthology it has a tone and pathos all its own. Homer felt it when he put those great words into the mouth of one of his heroes: "Ah, friend, if once escaped this battle we were evermore to be ageless and deathless"; but then follows the Homeric conclusion: "Now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to another man, or he to us." The feeling is latent in the epigrams of Simonides on those who perished in the Persian war, as in the two lines over the Spartan tomb at Thermopylæ: "O passer-by, tell the Lacedæmonians that we lie here obeying their orders"—but with it how much else! The difference in the epigrams is all in the moral.

The will has been loosened and the foreboding of brevity leads not to greater resolve, but to indulgence; and in the same way, in place of the boast of immortality through duty performed—the "praise that grows not old"—comes petulant indifference:

Straight is the descent to Hades, whether thou wert to go from Athens or takest thy journey from Meroë; let it not vex thee to have died so far away from home; from all lands the wind that blows to Hades is but one.

That moral, which we have already seen in the verse of Asclepiades, is sharpened in these lines of Palladas, most disillusioned of all the epigrammatists:

All human must pay the debt [the Roman "morti debemur"], nor is there any mortal who knows whether he shall be alive to-morrow; learning this clearly, O man, make thee merry, keeping the wine-god close by thee for oblivion of death, and take thy pleasure with the Paphian while thou drawest thy ephemeral life; but all else give to Fortune's control.

You may say that the conclusion, too, is common to a large body of poetry outside of the Anthology. So doubtless it is. You will find it, to go back to the seventh century B.C., in the elegies of old Mimnermus; it is the philosophy of Horace and, through him, of men of the world generally. Yet if one reads these poets and the epigrammatists side by side, one catches a difference of note and emphasis, a something that sets them in two separate classes. Perhaps it is

the suspicion of weariness in the diction of the epigrams that renders them so distinct from Mimnermus, while they lack that final adjustment of language which makes of Horace's most questionable Epicureanism almost a lesson in austerity. Only one who reads in the original will quite understand such a distinction; but there are other differences that inhere in the substance of the epigrams. One feels that to these later moralists their very scepticism is something old and long-ago experienced, and that so it involuntarily passes into badinage, even when the intention is mocking and bitter. It is as if some guest at the banquet table, when the fancy flagged, forgot himself so far as to speak solemnly of the end of things, and another were to rebuke him lightly:

> All life is a stage and a game: either learn to play it, laying by seriousness, or bear its pains.

(Is it accident that the very word "seriousness," *σπουδή*, is that which is naturally applied to the classic literature of Greece, while game, *παίγνιον*, was the technical term for these later expressions of wit?) And then another after another of the guests takes up the challenge:

> Often I sang this, and even out of the grave will I cry it: "Drink, before you put on this raiment of dust."

(How strangely the words prelude the thought of FitzGerald's Omar; and so also the following:)

Give me the sweet cup wrought of the earth from which I was born, and under which I shall lie dead.

(But the Persian did not jest so amusingly as this wanton Greek:)

Must I not die? What matters it to me whether I depart to Hades gouty or fleet of foot? for many will carry me; let me become lame, for hardly on their account need I ever cease from revelling.

Day by day we are born as night retires, no more possessing aught of our former life, estranged from our course of yesterday, and beginning to-day the life that remains. Do not then call thyself, old man, abundant in years; for thou hast no share in what is gone.

(And the end of this fitting sequel to the old impressionism of Protagoras?—)

All is laughter, and all is dust, and all is nothing; for out of unreason is all that is.

(And yet not quite the end. Not laughter, but silence, awaited that world finally, as it awaited the banqueters:)

Thou talkest much, O man, and thou art laid in earth after a little; keep silence, and while thou yet livest, meditate on death.

For the spirit of resignation lies beneath all this laughter and incentive to joy. One is struck by the repetition here and there of the great motto of ancient Greece: *Think as a mortal;* and by the change in its meaning. The words are no longer, as they were in Pindar and Sophocles, and even

in Demosthenes, a warning against the insolent pride, or *hybris*, that would storm the heavens, but a plea for ease: "Haste not, toil not; as thou canst, give, share, consume; think as a mortal." This humanity is merely an aspect of that accepted comfort of littleness which forms the compensation for the too clear perception of mutability. One feels this most strongly in the section of the Anthology headed *Religion*, for the very gods have shrunk in their dimensions, like the desires and ambitions of their worshippers. "Small to see am I, Priapus, who inhabit this spit of shore," begins one of the epigrams, and another, which Dr. Mackail entitles *Fortuna Parvulorum*, is still more pathetic in its humility:

> Even me the little god of small things if thou call upon in due season thou shalt find; but ask not for great things; since whatsoever a god of the commons can give to a labouring man of this I, Tycho, have control.

To me there is something deeply touching in this *little god of small things*, this turning from Olympus, so far away, to one of the *di minorum gentium*, and in this *ask not for great things*. And when destiny has done its worst, and the family is broken by calamity, the prayer of the survivor is still for the least consolation:

> I wept the doom of my Theionoë, but borne up by hopes of her child I wailed in lighter grief; and now a jealous fate has bereft me of the child also; alas, babe, I am cozened of even thee, all that was left me. Per-

sephone, hearken thus much at a father's lamentation; lay the babe on the bosom of its dead mother.

No English words can quite suggest the littleness and tenderness of that phrase in the last clause, *thes brephos*.

This is the cry that runs all through the Anthology; but the one thing passionately desired and prayed for, the one seemingly small boon, was beyond the giving of the great or the little gods. No wish is repeated so continually by these poets as the longing for remembrance. All things are fleeting; nothing is our own, not even this spark of life which is owed to Death; but Oh, grant that after our going some interposition of human memory come between us and utter obliteration. That longing is common, a commonplace, if you will. The heroes of the Iliad felt it in the underworld; and the pains of the lost in Dante's Inferno are pointed by the dread of being forgotten among the living. But the desire in this fading pagan world is something different from these. The braving of forgetfulness or the prayer for remembrance lies naturally at the heart of these poems, which spring from the epitaph and the inscription. It is not only that the dead cry to the living to be kept from oblivion, but the living themselves beg a place in the thought of strangers and passers-by. "Sit beneath the poplars here, wayfarer, when thou art weary," runs the writing on a wayside tomb, "and drawing nigh drink of our spring; and even far away

remember the fountain that Simus sets by the side of Gillus his dead child."

In the end that comfort of little things and this craving to be remembered are but signs of the coming together of the sense of transitoriness and the spirit of kindliness which mark the character of this whole literature. Kindliness—yes, if any one word can convey the innermost quality of these epigrams, it is that. They are kindly in many subtle ways. It is not only that friendship is directly celebrated, as in the epigram of Callimachus so finely translated by William Cory:

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead.
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take—

it is not only this, but a feeling of friendliness with the world at large pervades almost the whole Anthology. It explains the "charm of nature" (the words actually occur in one of the epigrams) felt by these writers in the protected valleys and wayside fountains, as it exaggerates their disease at the salt, estranging sea. It extends to the

gods, who are very near to help, as a human friend would be. Even Pan, for a moment, is willing to leave his mountain revels and come as the good physician:

This for thee, O pipe-player, minstrel, gracious god, holy lord of the Naiads who pour their urns, Hyginus made as a gift, whom thou, O protector, didst draw nigh and make whole of his hard sickness; for among all my children thou didst stand by me visibly, not in a dream of night, but about the mid-circle of the day.

Among men the feeling of kinship is fostered both by prosperity and misfortune. Does the sailor accomplish a safe voyage? Forthwith he records his thankfulness at some shrine of Poseidon, with a prayer for general mercy: "Holy Spirit of the great Shaker of Earth, be thou gracious to others also." Does he perish by the way? Some stranger or comrade buries him with an inscription which speaks at once his desire of remembrance and his good-will toward others: "Well be with you, O mariners, both at sea and on land; but know that you pass by the grave of a shipwrecked man." Scarcely any theme in the Anthology is commoner than this plea of the shipwrecked or exiled traveller to the passer-by; it seems to have been peculiarly welcome to the poet who would enhance the comfort of the banquet by pictures of distant toil and danger, and from this use it passed into the general repertory of the epigrammatists.

But I will not follow this note of kindliness through all its obvious and hidden manifestations. There is nothing entirely like it, I believe, to be found anywhere else, and more than any other quality it lends to the epigrams a beautiful and unique distinction. Its gentleness does not belong to the great pagan world, and might remind one rather of the new spirit of Christianity. So, when one reads the call to rest of Hermes to those "whose knees are tired with heavy toil," the temptation is strong to compare it with the words of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." But the similarity, it need not be said, is fallacious. There is no new-born faith underlying the mercy and friendliness of the Anthology, no mutual love binding together the children of a heavenly Father; nor, on the other hand, is there any touch of the mysticism, such as that in the *Rubaiyat*, which makes the whole world kin—and kind. The spirit is here rather the offspring of utter surrender to doubt, the brotherhood of those who have cut off the long hope and must find their comfort together and in the way of small things.

It should not, therefore, be supposed that the final impression of these epigrams is one of morose despondency. Rather, we rise from their perusal chastened in mood, but strangely heartened in endurance. The book is above all companionable, and has an insinuation of appeal that no other work quite possesses. Occasionally the word of

bitterness escapes, or a phrase of less jocular satire; but these are quickly repressed as errors of taste against the occasion. Something of this is due to the origin of the epigram, but something also to the recollection of the proud civilisation of which these men were still the disinherited heirs. "Though thy life be fixed in one seat," writes an epigrammatist of the age of Augustus, "and thou sailest not the sea nor treadest the roads on dry land, yet by all means go to Attica that thou mayest see those great nights of the worship of Demeter; whereby thou shalt possess thy soul without care among the living, and lighter when thou must go to the place that awaiteth all." These poets, whose names for the most part mean so little to us, had partaken in memory of the *great nights* of Hellas, and, if the vision did not incite them to strenuous emulation, it at least made their soul lighter for the descending path—*θυμὸν ἐλαφρότερον*. Even, at times, this serenity in the acceptance of fortune can imitate the nobler faith:

Me Chelidon, priestess of Zeus, an aged woman well-skilled to make libation on the altars of the immortals, happy in my children, free from grief, the tomb holds; for with no shadow in their eyes the gods saw my piety.

THE PRAISE OF DICKENS

If it ever seemed that the popularity of Dickens was waning, certainly there is no such appearance to-day. Publishers have been vying with one another in putting out his works in attractive form, and now Messrs. Chapman & Hall have begun to issue the National Edition in forty volumes, including many pieces never before collected, and designed in every way to be definitive. And all the while about his work there is going up a critical chorus of praise, mingling the long growl of Swinburne's bass, the flute-like melody of Mrs. Meynell, the jumping staccato of Mr. Chesterton, with I know not how many lesser notes. This indeed is well, if by chance it helps us to move more familiarly in the shadow world that Dickens evoked. But no one can read these panegyrists without observing a curious fact: they all erect some bogus enemy, whom they thereupon proceed to knock over. Just who this dark miscreant of criticism may be, does not appear, for at the present hour scarcely a dissentient voice can be heard. Is it possible they are protesting against a reservation in their own minds? And, again, one observes a tendency to laud Dickens by a kind of bravado for the very qualities in which he is weakest. So, for exam-

ple, you may read Mrs. Meynell, herself a writer of exquisite English, in praise of Dickens as a stylist, whereas it used to be accepted for a truism that Dickens had no style, as, indeed, properly speaking, he has not. This is not to deny that he was a master of the clinging, inevitable epithet, or that he was a maker of memorable phrases, or even that his language for many purposes was abundantly efficient. But style—not the grand, or the vigorous, or the antithetic, or the florid, but style in itself—is something different from these qualities; it is rather that rare gift of words, that union of simplicity and freshness, which lends a charm to writing quite independent of the ideas or images conveyed. Some great writers have never acquired it—George Eliot did not; others of less genius have had it always at command, as did Mrs. Gaskell; while to the greatest it belongs as do all things else. Certainly, of style in this sense, Dickens was never the possessor. Take the opening words of his last work, when, if ever, he should have been master of his craft: "An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral Tower be here! The well-known massive grey square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here!" It is not too much to say that the practical writer who could begin a book thus, was radically deficient in the niceties of language.

And the faults of this passage point to some

of the factors that go to the making of style. Manifestly, there must be no false emphasis, no straining for effect beyond the needs of the time and place, no appearance of uneasiness, but quiet assurance and self-subordination. The law of style may be defined as the rule of Apollo: Nothing too much; it is the art first of all of dealing frankly with the commonplace and the trivial without being common or mean. And it does not end here. In the more important passages, where direct pathos or humour or strong emotion of any kind is expressed, other qualities may conceal the absence of style; but where elevation is to be attained without this immediate appeal, nothing can take the place of the law of fitness and balance. I was struck while reading *David Copperfield* with the comparison of a scene in that book with a similar scene in *Henry Esmond*. Both have to do with the coming of a son to the home of a buried mother, who in life had suffered cruel wrong and bereavement, and only in the grave had found peace. There is here no occasion for passionate tears, but only that pathos of reflection which subdues the heart and sweetens memory. To read the closing sentences of Thackeray and Dickens side by side is a practical lesson in language:

> Might she sleep in peace—might she sleep in peace; and we, too, when our struggles and pains are over! But the earth is the Lord's as the heaven is; we are alike his creatures here and yonder. I took a little flower off

the hillock and kissed it, and went my way, like the bird that had just lighted on the cross by me, back into the world again. Silent receptacle of death; tranquil depth of calm, out of reach of tempest and trouble! I felt as one who had been walking below the sea, and treading amidst the bones of shipwrecks.

So Esmond turns away from the burial ground of the convent at Brussels. The page in *David Copperfield* is almost as well known:

From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. What Peggotty had told me now, was so far from bringing me back to the later period, that it rooted the earlier image in my mind. It may be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest.

The passage from Thackeray may be commonplace in thought and a little over-sweet in sentiment, but the language has an unmistakable charm; whereas it seems to me that any one who is not conscious of something discordant in the close of Dickens' paragraph, in the false cadences and in the impropriety of the word "cancelled," must be equally dull to the truer and finer harmonies of language. And this passage is thoroughly typical of Dickens in his moods of reflective elevation.

Not all the modern praise of Dickens, to be sure,

displays this perversity, and, whatever may be said against Mr. Chesterton's ebullition of doubtful epigrams, at least he has avoided the error of choosing the shortcomings of Dickens for commendation.[1] Rightly he lays stress on the superb irresponsibility of Dickens' world, and the divine folly of his characters. "Dickens's art," he says, "is like life, because, like life, it is irresponsible. . . . Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; . . . the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest." And again he stresses rightly the democratic nature of his genius: "Dickens stands first as a defiant monument of what happens when a great literary genius has a literary taste akin to that of the community. . . . His power, then, lay in the fact that he expressed with an energy and brilliancy quite uncommon the things close to the common mind." I am inclined to think that in his analysis of this genuine, not condescending, democracy, Mr. Chesterton has found the real key to most that attracts and repels us in the novels; yet even here he has not quite escaped the malign influence that lies in wait for the critic of Dickens. Why must Mr. Chesterton imply on every page that great art is always, like that of Dickens, democratic? It is, on the contrary, a simple statement of fact to say that in practically all the living literature of the past the predominant note has been aristocratic.

[1] *Charles Dickens: a Critical Study*, by G. K. Chesterton. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1906.

Who, to take a single illustration, is not acquainted with the outrageous contempt of the Elizabethan playwrights for the multitude whose taste they were in part compelled to conciliate? Walt Whitman knew this well enough, and divided literature into two great epochs, the aristocratic of the past, and the democratic which was to spring from his own example. Tolstoy knows it, and finds Shakespeare merely tiresome.[1]

[1] There lies before me now a little book called *Tolstoy on Shakespeare* (Funk & Wagnalls Co.), containing three essays by Tolstoy, Ernest Crosby, and Bernard Shaw, respectively. The first reports thus on reading the greatest of Shakespeare's plays: "Not only did I feel no delight, but I felt an irresistible repulsion and tedium." The second, extolling the democracy of Milton, Shelley, and Burns, begins his destructive criticism: "But Shakespeare?—Shakespeare? where is there a line in Shakespeare to entitle him to a place in this brotherhood? Is there anything in his plays that is in the least inconsistent with all that is reactionary?" As for Mr. Shaw, it is well known that his complaint against the elder dramatist is chiefly because he was not like Mr. Shaw. But there is also in his hatred a touch of the same feeling that moves Tolstoy. One need not be a blind worshipper of Shakespeare to resent such small talk as this. And is it not time that somebody spoke the truth about Tolstoy? I do not mean the author of *Anna Karenina*, but the critic who makes the taste of an illiterate Russian peasant the criterion of art and who preaches the gospel of peace in the spirit of malignaut iconoclasm. Why should we show respect for this portentous charlatanry? I canuot see that the sacrifices of Tolstoy's life absolve him from such a charge. Quite

The currents of ruling opinion are, indeed, likely here to introduce confusion into any mind, for the question is not without complications. Mr. Chesterton, with his own pungency of epithet, designates the democratic element in literature as the "pungent and popular stab," and finds that the universal test of what may be called popular, of the people, is whether it employs vigorously the extremes of the tragic and the comic. Barring the loose use of the word "tragic," the definition is excellent, and undoubtedly in the judgments of the heart the people is right. From this source of power the maker of books will sever himself only to his own great peril. The demand for simple uncontrolled emotions, for clear moral decisions meting out happiness to the good and misery to the evil, (which is something quite different from tragedy,) the call for immediacy of effect and the direct use of the material of life—all this is the democratic soil from which literature must spring. Without this it lacks sap and the comfort of sweet reality. We feel the partial want of such a basis in the French classical drama, splendid as the work of that courtly age otherwise is.

Yet there is an odd paradox connected with

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the best thing in Mr. Chesterton's book is the contrast between reformers such as Gorky, who write of *Creatures that Once were Men*, and Dickens, across all whose sketches of the unfortunate might be written the title, *Creatures that Still are Men*.

this emotional root of letters : while it alone gives life, it cannot keep alive. Racine has outlived and will long outlive all the merely popular dramas ever written ; one can foresee a time when Milton will be more read than Bunyan ; the enjoyment of Gray's poems already is wider and less artificial than the taste for ballads which sprang warm from the communal heart. The straightforward appeal to the passions, the pathos and humour of the moment, have a strange trick of becoming obsolete with the passing of time and the change of circumstance. What threw the Globe Theatre into spasms of tears and laughter is, I suspect, not always the part of Shakespeare that moves us most to-day. The preservative of letters, what indeed makes literature, is the addition of all those qualities that, for the sake of comparison, we may call aristocratic,—the note of distinction which is concerned more with form than with substance, the reflective faculty which broods over the problems of morality, the questioning spirit which curbs spontaneity, the zest of discrimination which refines broad effects to the *nuance*, the power of fancy which transforms the emotions into ideas. In a word, the aristocratic element denotes self-control, discipline, suppression.

Now discipline and suppression Dickens never acquired, whether in art or character. No writer of England ever underwent in his life so sharp a contrast of neglect and celebrity, and the effect of

either condition upon him is equally significant. His father, it is well known, furnished a model for the glorious, but rather uncomfortable, Mr. Micawber; his mother apparently was a heartless woman. Out of the shifting, and sometimes shifty, scenes of his youth, one experience stands out—his apprenticeship in a blacking factory, which he was later to describe as David Copperfield's slavery in the bottling establishment of Murdstone & Grinby. In a bit of autobiography which he once confided to his friend Forster, he shows how painfully he remembered the waste and degradation of that time:

> No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship; compared these every-day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. . . . From that hour until this at which I write, no word of that part of my childhood which I have now gladly brought to a close has passed my lips to any human being. I have no idea how long it lasted; whether for a year, or much more, or less. From that hour until this my father and my mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it, however far off and remote, from either of them. I have never, until I now impart it to this paper,

in any burst of confidence with any one, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God.

He learned much in those dismal days—the foul spots of London, the slime of the river, the inside of Marshalsea prison (where his father was), the pawnshops, and decayed lodging houses; but one thing he did not learn—the chastening of spirit that suffering is supposed to bestow. He came up from that descent into ignominious drudgery in a state of nervous exacerbation. The memory of it rankled in his breast, and he never forgave his mother for her willingness to abandon him to that base misery. In his art he would describe the spectacle of poverty with enormous gusto, but the dull, aching resignation at the core of it and its discipline he left for others to lay bare.

A few years of miscellaneous occupation followed, as schoolboy, lawyer's clerk, and reporter; and then, in 1834, at the age of twenty-two, he began to publish the *Sketches of Boz*. Two years later *Pickwick* opened its career in monthly numbers, and soon raised the author to an incredible pitch of popularity. Wealth came to him almost at a bound, while he was still little more than a boy, and overweening fame as it came to no other man, even in those days of sudden celebrity. And it cannot be said that the effect upon him was wholly agreeable. Magnanimous in many ways, no doubt he always remained, and lovable to a

few people, even to Carlyle, who could write of him after his death as "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens—every inch of him an honest man"; but it is true, nevertheless, that his vanity was brought by all this egregious adulation to a state of unwholesome irritability. Applause could not reach him quickly enough and loud enough, and in the end he was almost ready to give up authorship for the noisier excitement of public recitation. There are many accounts of his manner of reading, or, more properly, acting; it was emphatic, intense; if anything, over-dramatic, like his writing. "I had to go yesterday to Dickens's Reading," writes Carlyle; he "acts better than any Macready in the world; a whole tragic, comic, heroic, *theatre* visible, performing under one *hat*, and keeping us laughing—in a sorry way, some of us thought—the whole night." Alas, how sorry a way! It is not only the waste of so splendid talents that we regret, but there is something distressful in the very thought of this great man brutalising his face to the likeness of Bill Sykes, or mopping and mowing as Fagin, out of the mere craving for publicity. To me, at least, it is one of the many painful chapters in our literary annals. And I think he could not have so paltered with his genius if his characters had ever been other than the product of a stupendous dramatic egotism.

Neither suffering nor prosperity brought him the one gift denied at his birth, intellectual

pudor, and the absence of that restraining faculty passed, as how could it help passing, into his work. We are permitted to-day to use the word gentleman only at our risk, and the saying has gone abroad that it is vulgar to speak of vulgarity. Nevertheless it is merely idle to conceal the fact, as is commonly done in recent criticism, that a strain of vulgarity runs through Dickens. It is not that his characters belong for the most part to low life, but rather that they do not all move in that sphere. For the grace and ease that are born of voluntary self-discipline he had no measure, and the image of the gentleman which springs from that source he had no power of evoking. He was, with one or two doubtful and insignificant exceptions, equally unqualified to create or to satirise such a character. In all his novels you will meet with no Henry Esmond or William Dobbin, no, nor any Major Pendennis or Marquis of Steyne, for these also are the result of discipline, however selfish its end may have been. Unfortunately you will come here and there upon some distorted shadow of them which only betrays where the master's cunning failed. I do not see why we should refuse the word vulgarity where it so eminently belongs.

To the same cause must be attributed the absence in Dickens of that kind of tragedy which involves the losing contest of a strong man with destiny and his triumph through spiritual discipline. His nearest approach to the tragic is in

the character of Bradley Headstone, but even here the second element is wanting, and there is more of pain than of liberation in the breaking of that obstinate soul. It may be said that this is not the proper field of the novelist, inasmuch as genuine tragedy requires also an instrument of ideal elevation which lies scarcely within the reach of prose fiction. So far Dickens was saved by his limitations from an attempt that would have been at best but a questionable success. In place of tragic awe, he has given us tears. I know that much of his pathos has grown stale with time, as that emotion is strangely apt to grow; yet here and there it still touches us in his stories as freshly almost as when they first came to the reader in monthly instalments; and, after all, they are but of yesterday. Most of us may find Dora, the child-wife, anything rather than pathetic, but there are few who will withhold their tears from the death of Little Nell.[1] Here is no conflict, no bitter and triumphant self-suppression; it is the picture of perfect meekness and gentleness fading flower-like in the breath of adversity. At his best there is a tenderness in the pathos of Dickens, a divine tenderness, I had almost said, which no other of our novelists has ever found. Who has been able to harden his heart when Copperfield, after the shame of Emily, talks with

[1] Yet Mr. Andrew Lang, in his *Letters to Dead Authors*, vows he is no more touched by Little Nell than by her lacrimose sisters.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham on the seashore? and when the old man, being asked whether they will desert the stranded boat that has been their home, replies?—

> Every night, as reg'lar as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say, "Come back, my child, come back!" If ever there 's a knock, Ham (partic'ler a soft knock), arter dark, at your aunt's door, doen't you go nigh it. Let it be her—not you—that sees my fallen child!

And again there is the same touch of human delicacy when, in the presence of David, the broken girl, discovered at last, sinks in her uncle's arms: "He gazed for a few seconds in the face; then stooped to kiss it—oh, how tenderly!—and drew a handkerchief before it." The beauty of the gesture is all the finer because it follows the coarsely conceived and coarsely written interview with the impossible Rosa Dartle. Nor was Ham, the lover of the girl, without something of that great-hearted tenderness. His death, with his enemy's, in the storm may border on melodrama, but it cannot blunt the memory of his last message to Emily, his parting with David by the boat-house, and then—

> With a slight wave of his hand, as though to explain to me that he could not enter the old place, he turned away. As I looked after his figure, crossing the waste in the moonlight, I saw him turn his face towards a strip

of silvery light upon the sea, and pass on, looking at it, until he was a shadow in the distance.

These things came to Dickens at times, and they give him freedom of the company of the greatest.

But if his pathos too often failed from some fault of taste, his humour was incessant and sure. I do not mean the mere ludicrousness of situation —the amiable Mr. Pickwick caught at eavesdropping, or the dashing Mr. Winkle on horseback, although there is abundance of this, too, in Dickens that has not grown stale—but the deeper and more thoroughly English humour of character. He is a humourist in the manner of Ben Jonson and Smollett and Sterne and a long line of others—the greatest of them, some think, and, alas that it should be so, the last, for with his followers, of whom Gissing is a type, a new spirit of sympathy enters hostile to the old spontaneous joy. It was not for nothing that his favourite reading as a child and as a man was the great novel writers of the eighteenth century. From their hands he received the art which his genius was to develop in a hundred ways. Humours, as Walpole observed, are native to England, being the product of a government which allows the individual to develop without restraint. Quite as often, I should say, they are in reality the escape in one direction of faculties otherwise pent up and oppressed—the exaggeration of some whim or eccentricity until the whole demeanour of a man is dominated by it. Their very essence, at

least as they come to us in art, is the insolence of irrepressible life. Sometimes Dickens descends into mere parrot-like reiteration of a phrase, such as "Barkis is willin'" or "I never will desert Mr. Micawber," but more commonly he invents a wonderful variety in sameness.

In one particular, in what may be called the humour of trade, Dickens is supreme. Others have seen the fruitfulness of this theme. Indeed, as Hazlitt remarks, "the chief charm of reading the old novels is from the picture they give of the egotism of the characters, the importance of each individual to himself, and his fancied superiority over every one else. We like, for instance, the pedantry of Parson Adams, who thought a schoolmaster the greatest character in the world, and that he was the greatest schoolmaster in it." Or, if we come to Dickens' own day, there is such a pedantic humourist as the Gypsy, who communicated to Borrow the secrets of rat-catching, and "spoke in the most enthusiastic manner of his trade, saying that it was the best trade in the world and most diverting, and that it was likely to last for ever." These characters are common enough everywhere, but in Dickens they flourish with extraordinary exuberance. Who can name them all?—from old Jack Bamber, the lawyer's clerk in the *Pickwick Papers*, with his doddering delight in the mouldering chambers and sordid tragedies of the Inns, to Durdles, the stone-cutter in *Edwin Drood*, with his grotesque complacency

"down in the crypt among the earthy damps there, and the dead breath of the old 'uns"—who can count them? What horror or pain or dull subjection can diminish their infinite zest in living? It has always seemed to me that Jasper's complaints about the cramped monotony of his existence and the need of subduing himself to his vocation were a species of treachery to the genius of his creator, a sign that the author's peculiar power was passing away, or, at least, suffering a change. Only when we come to Durdles do we recognise the real Dickens again, or to Sapsea enlarging gloriously on the education to be derived from auctioneering, or to Tartar fitting up his room like a ship's cabin so as to have a constant opportunity of knocking his head against the ceiling.

And this special quality of humour, shown by a man's exultation in his trade, leads to a trait of Dickens which might easily be overlooked. Commonly—always, I think, when most characteristic—he describes his people from the outside and not from within. Let us not be deceived by that "pungent and popular stab"; these emotions that touch us so quickly are not what the characters themselves would feel, but what Dickens, the great egotistic dramatic observer, felt while looking out upon them. This pathos is not the actual grief of one bewildered and crushed by circumstances; it is the yearning for tears, the γόου ἵμερος of the strong, impregnable heart. Do

you suppose that Smike ever knew in his own breast the luxury of sorrow he gave to his creator and still gives to the reader? His misery, I fear, was of a dumber, grimier sort.

And so with those characters that merge into the pedantry of humour, to repeat Hazlitt's happy phrase. It is the democracy of Dickens that called them into birth, no doubt, but something else entered into their composition in the end—the great joy of creation which made it impossible for the author to abide within their vexed circle. Possibly old Weller got such hilarious glee out of the misdoings of his wife and Stiggins as his words import, but what of a thousand weaker souls who hug the evil conditions of their lot? There is the ragged stoker in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, who nourishes a romantic comfort from his sympathy with the cinders and the roaring furnace that have been his whole existence. There is "No. 20," who became so inured to the Fleet that within its walls was freedom and all without was prison. And there is the sublime Quilp, almost the highest stroke of the master. He is brother to all the spooks and goblins of the credulous past, a pure creature of fairyland. His trade is malice, and the sheer exhilaration of evil never received a more perfect expression. Wickedness in him, losing its sullen despair, is turned to a godlike amusement. I cannot be persuaded that Mrs. Quilp really suffered on that memorable occasion when she sat up all night, while her

crooked lord smoked and imbibed grog; the pleasure of watching his fantastic features must have counteracted all sense of fatigue. In fact, we are told that she loved him to the end. It was unpardonable in Dickens to bring him to that fear and death in the slime of the river. Here he was misled by that other democratic instinct which demands the punishment of the malefactor, and if Dickens in creating Quilp had at all entered into the reality of evil, this grewsome climax would have been appropriate. But Quilp, the gay magician of malice, who breathed fire and whose drink was boiling rum—to think of him perishing in the cold element of water! A mere novice could have contrived his taking off better. There is a description of him in his solitary lair that suggests his true end:

Mr. Quilp once more crossed the Thames and shut himself up in his Bachelor's Hall, which, by reason of its newly erected chimney depositing the smoke inside the room and carrying none of it off, was not quite so agreeable as more fastidious people might have desired. Such inconveniences, however, instead of disgusting the dwarf with his new abode, rather suited his humour; so, after dining luxuriously from the public-house, he lighted his pipe, and smoked against the chimney until nothing of him was visible through the mist but a pair of red and highly inflamed eyes, with sometimes a dim vision of his head and face, as, in a violent fit of coughing, he slightly stirred the smoke and scattered the heavy wreaths by which they were obscured. In the midst of this atmosphere, which must infallibly have smothered any other man, Mr. Quilp passed the evening with great cheerful-

ness; solacing himself all the time with the pipe and the case-bottle; and occasionally entertaining himself with a melodious howl, intended for a song. . . . Thus he amused himself until nearly midnight, when he turned into his hammock with the utmost satisfaction.

That was the time and the scene for the catastrophe. In a wild burst of flame he and his guilty haunt should have disappeared forever, while his wife and accomplices looked on in terror, wondering if they beheld his distorted countenance still grimacing at them out of the ascending smoke. But it was notoriously the way of Dickens to bring his people to an impossible conclusion. Quilp he could drown, while of Micawber he made a dignified magistrate and of Traddles a prosperous lawyer.

So it is that the emotions in Dickens' work are quick to life, whereas the people are external to us, if not unreal; to make the inevitable comparison, we seem to have known Dickens' characters, Thackeray's we have lived. And this goes with the surprising diversity of judgments you may read in his admirers. Take the three critical studies that lie before me at the present moment—by Prof. A. W. Ward, Mr. Chesterton, and Gissing—and you will find them in a state of most bewildering disagreement. To Mr. Chesterton the epitaph of Sapsea on his wife is a bit of "beatific buffoonery," the true essential Dickens, whereas Gissing will none of it, and thinks it transcends the limits of art. Gissing can put no

faith in Mr. Peggotty, whereas Professor Ward finds this whole episode of Emily and her uncle the most perfect part of the book. Only he would exclude Rosa Dartle, who to Mr. Chesterton is one of Dickens' "real characters." Gissing rejoices to see Pecksniff in the end "felled to the ground," whereas Mr. Chesterton deems the penalty one of the peculiar blemishes in Dickens' dénouements. And so on through the list. Most astonishing of all, both Gissing and Professor Ward find special beauty in that story of "Doady" and Dora which to most readers, certainly, is an utterly tiresome piece of mawkishness.

Now there has been no such divergence of opinion among the admirers of Thackeray or Scott or any other of the great novelists. And the reason for it in the case of Dickens is plainly this, that his characters are so constructed that they will not bear analysis. Probably most people would join in calling Sam Weller (unless that honour is reserved for old Weller) the finest conception in Dickens, as his humour is the least subject to the disillusion of repetition. And yet, can any one really believe, if to his peril he stops to reflect, that such a union of innocence and worldly knowledge ever existed in a single breast? These conflicting judgments mean simply that the critical faculty has been at its dissolving work, not steadily, but at intervals, destroying the illusion where it touched and leaving other parts untroubled. For there is a right and a

wrong way to read, or at least to enjoy, Dickens, as I have in my own experience, if I may be allowed the egotism, emphatically discovered. A number of years ago, when I was living in the remote seclusion of Shelburne, about the only novels at my command were a complete set of Dickens in the village library. One day, being hungry for emotion, I started on these volumes, and read them through—read as only a starved man can read, without pause and without reflection, with the smallest intermissions for sleep. It was an orgy of tears and laughter, almost immoral in its excess, a joy never to be forgotten. Well, I have been reading the novels again, slowly now, and weighing their effect—and in comparison how meagre my pleasure is!

But the old way was the right way, I think, and he who opens his Dickens must be ready to surrender himself unreservedly to the magician's spell. And then, what a place is this into which he is carried! Who, while the charm is upon him, for any realism of art would exchange the divine impertinence of a world inhabited by Mrs. Gamp, and Richard Swiveller, and the Marchioness, and Mark Tapley, and Toots, and Mantilini, and Mrs. Nickleby, and the fat boy—but the list is as endless as the master's hand was indefatigable. "The key of the great characters of Dickens," says Mr. Chesterton, "is that they are all great fools." If one were asked to sum up in a single phrase the effect of all this mad variety

of humours, one might call it the actual evocation into life of that doctrine of Folly which Erasmus taught in his *Stultitiæ Laus*, some four centuries ago. We see the preacher in his pulpit, expounding his lesson in examples that Holbein limned so astutely; we hear him contrast the feeble generation of the calculators and the sane with the large-hearted children of folly—poets and martyrs, whimsicals and originals, and all those whom the world esteems mad, but who follow who knows what divine deep-seated guidance: "Quod si mortales prorsus ab omni sapientiæ commercio temperarent, ac perpetuo mecum ætatem agerent, ne esset quidem ullum senium, verum perpetuâ iuventâ fruerentur felices." And this should be the motto for all the *mystæ* who have been sealed into the fellowship of that secret knowledge: "Ut nihil est stultius præposterâ sapientiâ, ita perversâ prudentiâ nihil imprudentius." Nothing, indeed, is more foolish than the preposterous wisdom, nothing more imprudent than the perverse prudence, which would withdraw a man from the untroubled fruition of all that Dickens has so bountifully provided.

GEORGE GISSING

WHEN Gissing died at St. Jean de Luz, in 1903, broken down at the age of forty-six by years of toil and privation, he had begun to acquire in the world at large something of the reputation he had long possessed among a select circle. But it is to be feared that the irony of his later works, such as the posthumous volume of tales recently published,[1] may create a wrong impression of his genius among these newly won friends. For Gissing, more than most writers, underwent a change with the progress of time. His work in fact may be divided into three fairly distinct periods. Passing over the immature *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), we may mark off the first group of novels as beginning with *The Unclassed* (1884), and ending with *Born in Exile* (1892); between these two are *Isabel Clarendon*,

[1] *The House of Cobwebs and Other Stories.* By George Gissing. To which is prefixed *The Work of George Gissing*, an introductory study, by Thomas Seccombe. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906. Several of the most important of Gissing's earlier novels are not to be found in New York, either in bookshop or library; and, indeed, he cannot be said ever to have been properly published at all. By getting together a complete and decently printed edition of his works some enterprising publisher might benefit himself and the community.

Demos, *Thyrza*, *A Life's Morning*, *The Nether World*, *The Emancipation*, and *New Grub Street*. The second group, starting with *Denzil Quarrier* (1892), may be limited by *The Crown of Life* (1899), although the transition here to his final manner is more gradual than the earlier change. This second division embraces what are perhaps the best known of Gissing's novels—the *Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*—and here again there is danger of misunderstanding. These are books of undeniable power, comparable in some ways to Hardy's *Jude, the Obscure*, but pointed in the wrong direction, and not truly characteristic. One feels a troubling and uncertain note in all this intermediate work, done while the author, having passed beyond his first intense preoccupation with the warfare for existence, was still far from the fair serenity of his close. The greater Gissing is not to be found here, but in those tales which embody his own experiences in the cruel and primeval nether world of London—tales which together make what might be called the Epic of Poverty.

Poverty, the gaunt greedy struggle for bread, the naked keen reality of hunger that goads the world onward—how this grim power reigns in all Gissing's early novels, crushing the uninured dreamers and soiling the strong. It is the guiding power of *The Unclassed*. It casts its spume of disease and misery on the path of *Thyrza*,[1] that

[1] It is a curious comment on the manufacture of books

fragile Madonna of the slums, yet finds even here its pathetic voice of song :

A street organ began to play in front of a public-house close by. Grail drew near ; there were children forming a dance, and he stood to watch them.

Do you know that music of the obscure ways, to which children dance? Not if you have only heard it ground to your ears' affliction beneath your windows in the square. To hear it aright you must stand in the darkness of such a by-street as this, and for the moment be at one with those who dwell around, in the blear-eyed houses, in the dim burrows of poverty, in the unmapped haunts of the semi-human. Then you will know the significance of that vulgar clanging of melody ; a pathos of which you did not dream will touch you, and therein the secret of hidden London will be half revealed. The life of men who toil without hope, yet with the hunger of an unshaped desire ; of women in whom the sweetness of their sex is perishing under labour and misery ; the laugh, the song of the girl who strives to enjoy her year or two of youthful vigour, knowing the darkness of the years to come ; the careless defiance of the youth who feels his blood and revolts against the lot which would tame it ; all that is purely human in these darkened multitudes speaks to you as you listen.

A superb piece of imaginative prose, indeed, as Mr. Seccombe calls it, and significant of the music which Gissing himself wrested from the pathos of the London streets. The note rises in

that *Thyrza*, which was published in 1887, has never been reprinted. I had to wait many months before I could pick up a secoud-hand copy, but my reward was great. It is a book of rare, poignant beauty. To the beginner in Gissing I should recommend this novel first.

Life's Morning to tragic shrillness, making of it one of the most passionate stories in English of love striving against degraded associations. Again, in *New Grub Street*, it sinks to the forlorn plea of genius baffled by unremunerative toil and starved into despair. Those who care to know the full measure of agony through which the writer himself struggled, may find it portrayed here in the lives of the two unrecognized novelists. Only Gissing could tell how much of his own experience was poured into those "dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books"; how much of his fierce aspiration to paint the world as it really exists was expressed by the garret-haunting, hunger-driven Biffen; how often his breast, like Reardon's, swelled with envy of the prosperous, commercialised man of letters. "He knew what poverty means. The chilling of brain and heart, the unnerving of the hands, the slow gathering about one of fear and shame and impotent wrath; the dread feeling of helplessness, of the world's base indifference. Poverty! Poverty!" I am not sure that it is good to know these things even by hearsay, but for those who are strong in pity and fortified by resolve they have been written out once for all, ruthlessly, without mitigation.

More general, gathering up all the suffering and foulness and crime of want, embracing too the clear-eyed charity of strength that asks for no reward, is that terrible story of *The Nether*

World. Here, most of all, Gissing is conscious of his grave theme. We have seen the pathetic joy of the children dancing to the simple music of the street organ ; it may be well to compare with it a fragment of the chapter *Io Saturnalia !* which describes a holiday of revelling at the Crystal Palace :

It is a great review of the People ! On the whole how respectable they are, how sober, how deadly dull! See how worn-out the poor girls are becoming, how they gape, what listless eyes most of them have ! The stoop in the shoulders so universal among them merely means over-toil in the work-room. Not one in a thousand shows the elements of taste in dress ; vulgarity and worse glares in all but every costume. Observe the middle-aged women ; it would be small surprise that their good-looks had vanished, but whence comes it that they are animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness? Mark the men in their turn ; four in every six have visages so deformed by ill-health that they excite disgust. . . .

A great review of the People. Since man came into being, did the world ever exhibit a sadder spectacle? . . .

On the terraces dancing has commenced ; the players of violins, concertinas, and penny whistles do a brisk trade among the groups eager for a rough-and-tumble valse ; so do the pickpockets. Vigorous and varied is the jollity that occupies the external galleries, filling now in expectation of the fireworks ; indescribable the mingled tumult that roars heavenward. Girls linked by the half-dozen arm in arm leap along with shrieks like grotesque mænads ; a rougher horse-play finds favour among the youths, occasionally leading to

fisticuffs. Thick voices bellow in fragmentary chorus; from every side comes the yell, the cat-call, the ear-rending whistle; and as the bass, the never-ceasing accompaniment, sounds the myriad-footed tramp, tramp, along the wooden flooring. A fight, a scene of bestial drunkenness, a tender whispering between two lovers, proceed concurrently in a space of five square yards. Above them glimmers the dawn of star-light.

It is not strange that the witness and recorder of these things should have interposed the question: Did the world ever exhibit a sadder spectacle? Only one is surprised that to his memory, steeped as it was in classic history, the words of Pericles did not involuntarily arise: "Poverty is no bar. . . . And our laws have provided for the mind an ever-recurring respite from toil by the appointment of public recreations and religious ceremonies throughout the year, performed with peculiar elegance, and by their daily delight driving away sordid care." How far we of the modern world have progressed from the philosophy of joy! We are not now at Athens, at the graves of those who died in battle for their native land, but in the harsher warfare of industrial London. And as a chorus above all the sounds of defeat and consternation rises the clamorous cry of "Mad Jack," like the prophesying of some Jeremiah of the slums:

"Don't laugh! Don't any of you laugh; for as sure as I live it was an angel stood in the room and spoke to me. There was a light such as none of you ever saw, and the angel stood in the midst of it. And he said to

me: 'Listen, while I reveal to you the truth, that you may know where you are and what you are; and this is done for a great purpose.' And I fell down on my knees, but never a word could I have spoken. Then the angel said: 'You are passing through a state of punishment. You, and all the poor among whom you live; all those who are in suffering of body and darkness of mind were once rich people, with every blessing the world can bestow, with every opportunity of happiness in yourselves and of making others happy. Because you made an ill use of your wealth, because you were selfish and hard-hearted and oppressive, and sinful in every kind of indulgence, therefore after death you received the reward of wickedness. This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is hell! There is no escape for you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower shall you sink in want and misery; at the end there is waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is hell—hell—hell!'" . . . Above the noise of the crowd rose a shrill, wild voice, chanting:

"All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise him and magnify him forever!"

It has seemed worth while to quote thus at length, because Gissing is one of the few English novelists whose trained and supple language makes itself felt in such extracts, and because his first lesson of life is shown in them so clearly. "Put money in thy purse," might seem to be the upshot of it all; "and again, put money in thy purse; for as the world is ordered, to lack current coin is to lack the privileges of humanity, and indigence is the death of the soul." It is a

dubious philosophy, one which the writer's own heroic culture rebuked, and yet, what is it more than the modern rendering of Homer's *δούλιον ἦμαρ*—

> Jove fix'd it certain, that what ever day
> Makes man a slave, takes half his worth away?

But, waiving the point in ethics, there still remains the question of art: what profit is it, one asks, to paint in all its hideous colours this death of the soul, to forget the glad things of the world for its shadows, to deny Agamemnon and Achilles and choose Thersites for the hero of our tale? "Art, nowadays," Gissing replies boldly, "must be the mouthpiece of misery, for misery is the key-note of modern life." It is not entirely easy to reconcile such a theory with the judgment of Gissing's own riper years; for art, he came in the end to think, is "an expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life." Certainly, it is this contrast between the misery and the zest of life, derived from the same materials, that makes the comparison between Dickens and Gissing so inevitable. Gissing felt it, and his *Critical Study* of Dickens is, as a result, a curiously ambiguous piece of writing; his intention is to praise, but he can never quite overcome his surprise and annoyance at the radical difference of Dickens' attitude toward poverty. And the same feeling crops out again and again in the earlier novels. Inextinguishable laughter were fittest,

he says, musing on his own terrible nether world and thinking of the elder writer's gaiety, but the heart grows heavy. And elsewhere he blames the shallowness of Dickens, and calls on fiction to "dig deeper" into the substratum of life. The question thus posed exhibits one of the irreducible differences of artistic method. In my last essay I tried to show how Dickens tended to portray his characters from the outside, without identifying himself with their real emotions. Here, on the contrary, we have a man whose ambition it was to strip off to the last rag those veils of melodrama and humour, which prevented Dickens from becoming a realist, and which, it may be added, he himself by native right possessed in large measure. He would not be waylaid and turned from his purpose by the picturesque grimaces of poverty, but would lay bare the sullen ugliness at its core; he would, in a word, write from the inside. The result of this difference of methods is too obvious to need attention here, but one rather curious detail I may point out. It has been observed that the people of Dickens indulge in a superhuman amount of drinking; wine and gin are elements of Gargantuan exhilaration. In Gissing's world, drunkenness is only a blind desire of escape from pain; and liquor, the rich man's friend, is the enemy always lying in wait to drag the needy to destruction.

Only by taking account of the sordid realities of Gissing's life can we understand the mingled

attraction and repulsion exercised on him by the large joyousness and exulting pathos of Dickens in dealing with the nether world. Nothing, to be sure, in his career, was more depressing than the slavery of Dickens under "Murdstone and Grinby," but whereas Dickens rose almost at a bound to enormous prosperity, the life of Gissing was one of the tragedies of literature. Hints of that story are scattered through all his novels,—a youth cast from the country into the streets of London to earn a living as best he could, a period of storm and stress including a frantic attempt on fortune in the United States, years of starving at literary work, followed by years of broken health. He came out at the last into the light, but almost his friends might have pointed to him, as the people of Verona pointed to Dante, saying: "There goes one who has been in hell." Naturally a tone of bitterness, something of his own lack of vitality, if you will, crept into his work. He always wavered between the pathetic fallacy on the one hand of ascribing to the poor the distress of his own over-wrought sensitiveness and on the other hand hatred of a Destiny that inures its victims to their lot. "The man who laughs," he said, reproachfully, "takes the side of a cruel omnipotence." The words are suggestive. Not "cruel," but *unimplicated*, let us say, and accept the phrase as a mark of the greater art. It is because Dickens stands with the powers above and is not finally implicated in his

theme, that he could turn it into an expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life. And it is, on the other hand, just because Gissing cannot entirely rise above the "misery" he describes, that all his marvellous understanding of the human heart and his chastened style do not quite save his art in the end.

And yet, if his theory and practice must from the highest standard be condemned, it would be unfair to overlook the reservations that should go with even so strict a judgment. For though the zest of life be lacking in these novels, there is something in them that strangely resembles it. "How" he exclaims in one of his latest works—"how, in the name of sense and mercy, is mankind content to live on in such a world as this?" The question obtrudes itself upon the reader again and again, and slowly he becomes aware of the vast, dumb, tumultuous *will to live* that is struggling into consciousness through all these horrors and madnesses. The very magnitude of the obstacles, the unreason of endurance, is witness to the unconquerable energy of this blind will. What, after all, has been the substance of great literature, from the days when Sarpedon heartened Glaucus on the plains of Troy to the most modern singer of some soul divided against itself, but warfare, and again renewed war? And as one reads on in these novels of Gissing's, their plot begins to unfold itself as another and darker picture of the same battle. It is almost as if we

were listening to the confused lamentation of a city besieged and captured by night, wherein the enemy is no invading army of Greece, but the more treacherous powers of hunger, and vice, and poverty :

Diverso interea miscentur mœnia luctu.

And there is another element which helps to relieve the depressing nature of Gissing's theme. Literature of the slums is not lacking in these latter days. Young men and women whose standards of life have been unsettled turn thitherward for some basis of reality and some reflected seriousness of emotion. In each of our large cities you will find a college settlement where a band of prurient souls sit at type-writing machines glutting a morbid ambition on the sorrows of the poor. Now, Gissing did not learn the meaning of poverty in any such fashion ; there is, at all events, nothing of the dilettante in his work. He wrote, not from callow sympathy or patronising observation, but from his own deep experience ; and, writing thus, he put into his account of the nether world the one thing commonly wanting to these pictures—the profound sense of morality. Through all these graphic, sometimes appalling, scenes one knows that the writer is still primarily concerned with the inner effects of poverty, and his problem is the ancient, insoluble antinomy of the one and the many, the individual and the mass. Taken as a whole, the society he describes

is the victim of circumstances. His philosophy is summed up in a gloomy determinism: "indigence is the death of the soul," and "misery is vice." And even where the instincts remain unsoiled, some hideous chance steps in to stunt the soul's growth:

> It strengthened his growing hatred of London, a huge battlefield calling itself the home of civilisation and of peace. Battlefield on which the wounds were of soul, no less than of body. In these gaunt streets along which he passed at night, how many a sad heart suffered, by the dim glimmer that showed at upper windows, a hopeless solitude amid the innumerable throng! Human cattle, the herd that feed and breed, with them it was well; but the few born to a desire forever unattainable, the gentle spirits who from their prisoning circumstance looked up and afar, how the heart ached to think of them! Some girl, of delicate instinct, of purpose sweet and pure, wasting her unloved life in toil and want and indignity; some man, whose youth and courage strove against a mean environment, whose eyes grew haggard in the vain search for a companion promised in his dreams; they lived, these two, parted perchance only by the wall of neighbour houses, yet all huge London was between them, and their hands would never touch.

That is the philosophy of circumstance that rules over Gissing's world as a whole. But even here, as in that chorus of "Mad Jack" already quoted, the contradictory and less comprehensible law of morality makes itself heard at times; and when he touches the individual the sure insight of the artist asserts itself, and he orders his people not as automatous, but as characters moved by

their own volition, and, though it may be in unaccountable ways, reaping as they have sown. The knot of fate and free-will is not always disentangled, there is no conventional apportioning of rewards and penalties such as Dickens indulged in at the end of his novels; but always, through all the workings of heredity and environment, he leaves the reader conscious of that last inviolable mystery of man's nature, the sense of personal responsibility. Had not he, George Gissing, been caught in the cruel network of circumstances, and had he not preserved intact the feeling that he was personally accountable? It is thus he attains by another road to something of the liberal enlargement of Dickens: the greatest art, it need scarcely be said, would combine both the free outlook of the older writer and the moral insight of the younger.

Those are the principles—the instinctive will to live and the law of moral responsibility—that saved the writer's tragic stage from insupportable dreariness; they furnished, also, the clue that in the end led the writer himself out of the labyrinth of doubtful questionings. But for a while it seemed as if they were to be lost, for it is not so much any lowering of literary skill as a change in these essential points that marks the transition from his first to his second period. Just what caused the alteration I cannot say. Possibly the long years of defeat began to shake his moral equilibrium; possibly the growing influence upon

him of French and Russian fiction was to blame. Certainly the pride of English, what raises it, despite its deficiencies of form and ideas, to be the first of modern literatures, is the deep-rooted convention of moral responsibility. It is that which through all its romantic divagations joins English so closely to Greek; which would have made Socrates more at home with Dr. Johnson than with any other man of our world, and would have rendered Æschylus the most appreciative listener of Shakespeare—if such associations are not too fanciful. No one can sprinkle himself with the scented water of Anatole France or dabble in the turbid Slavic pool without hazarding the loss of that traditional sense, and there are signs that Gissing's mind for a time was bewildered by ill-digested reading.

The new spirit may be defined by a comparison of such novels as *The Nether World* from his first period and *The Whirlpool* from his second (the very names are significant), or as *Life's Morning* and *The Crown of Life*. In place of human nature battling with grim necessity, we now have a society of people contending against endless insinuations of tedium and vanity; in place of the will to live we meet a sex-consciousness, always strong in Gissing, but now grown to morbid intensity. And with this change comes a certain relaxing of moral fibre. The unconscious theme is no longer self-responsibility, or character in the strict meaning of the term, but a thousand vexa-

tious questions of the day—anti-vivisection, anti-racing, anti-gambling, anti-hunting, anti-war, imperialism, the education of children, the emancipation of women, and, above all and more persistent than all, the thrice-dreary theories of marriage. The beginning of these may be traced back to *The Emancipated* (1890), written after he had been enabled by momentary success to visit Italy, the dream of his life. In that release from pressure his mind seems to have been left free to dwell on these problems resulting from the break-up of traditional obligations. But the core of the book is sound. "An educated woman, this," says Mallard, drawing the lesson of the heroine's life; "one who has learnt a good deal about herself and the world. She is 'emancipated,' in the true sense of the hackneyed word; that is to say, she is not only freed from those bonds that numb the faculties of mind and heart, but is able to control the native passions that would make a slave of her." And, indeed, it would be wrong to infer that the moral of his books is ever at bottom any other than this. In the full swing of his middle period he could close a novel with the ejaculation of his hero: "Now I understand the necessity for social law!" But one is aware, nevertheless, that conventions have grown irksome to him, and that his interest turns too much on the thronging, ambiguous problems of emancipation.

If the reading of modern Continental literature may be suspected of unsettling his inherited

canons, his home-coming in the end was surely due in large measure to his devoted study of the classics. Strange as it may seem when one considers the topics he treated, there is scarcely a writer of the last century more thoroughly versed in Greek and Latin than Gissing, and that no doubt is the reason why the names of antiquity come to mind involuntarily when one tries to characterise his work. Through his struggle with poverty he commonly kept free of the pawnshop a few chosen books, Homer, Tibullus, Horace, Gibbon, Shakespeare. Writing the memoirs of his life, at ease, and with a library at his command, he recalls his difficulties:

I see that alley hidden on the west side of Tottenham Court Road, where, after living in a back bedroom on the top floor, I had to exchange for the front cellar; there was a difference, if I remember rightly, of sixpence a week, and sixpence, in those days, was a very great consideration—why, it meant a couple of meals. (I once *found* sixpence in the street, and had an exultation which is vivid in me at this moment.) The front cellar was stone-floored; its furniture was a table, a chair, a washstand, and a bed; the window, which of course had never been cleaned since it was put in, received light through a flat grating in the alley above. Here I lived; here *I wrote*. Yes, "literary work" was done at that filthy deal table, on which, by the bye, lay my Homer, my Shakespeare, and the few other books I then possessed. At night, as I lay in bed, I used to hear the tramp, tramp of a *posse* of policemen who passed along the alley on their way to relieve guard; their heavy feet sometimes sounded on the grating above my window.

What a picture of the new Grub Street. One thinks of the deal table in Thoreau's hut at Walden on which a Homer lay, and one thinks, too, of Dickens in his comfortable study with his shelves of sham books. For most of his reading Gissing had to depend on public convenience :

> How many days have I spent at the British Museum, reading as disinterestedly as if I had been without a care! It astounds me to remember that, having breakfasted on dry bread, and carrying in my pocket another piece of bread to serve for dinner, I settled myself at a desk in the great Reading-Room with books before me which by no possibility could be a source of immediate profit. At such a time, I worked through German tomes on Ancient Philosophy. At such a time, I read Appuleius and Lucian, Petronius and the Greek Anthology, Diogenes Laertius and—heaven knows what! My hunger was forgotten ; the garret to which I must return to pass the night never perturbed my thoughts.

And Homer and Ancient Philosophy won the day. There was little occasion in the earlier novels to display this learning, yet here and there the author's longing for Rome and Italy breaks through, as in the passion of the apothecary's apprentice in *The Unclassed*. Then came the intellectual whirlpool. The release from that dizziness of brain shows itself first in a growing lightness of touch and aloofness from passion of all sorts. The novels and tales of the third period are chiefly distinguished by a tone of gentle and amused irony, in place of the satire of the middle group, and it is significant that the theme of *Will Warburton*,

his last novel, is the same as that chosen by Biffen in the *New Grub Street* for the pronunciamento of rebellious realism—the life of a retail grocer. Only in the actual novel there is no realism at all as Biffen would have understood it, but the witty and mock-heroic story of a man of good birth who begins by selling groceries over the counter under an assumed name and ends by accepting his lot in all *gaieté de cœur*—so far had Gissing travelled from being at loggerheads with destiny. *Warburton* was written in Southern France when a moderate success had freed him from the hardest slavery of the pen, and when ill health had driven him from England. Here, too, he absolved himself from an ancient vow by composing, with all the artistry he possessed, a story of classical life—his *Veranilda*—and here he wrote that restrained and every way beautiful piece of self-revelation, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft.*

There is nothing in the language quite like this volume of half-veiled autobiography. In the imagined quiet of a home in Devon, the part of England Gissing so passionately loved, he writes out his memories of toil and the reflections that come to him as the sum of his experiences. Here is no bitterness, no complaining; all the lesser problems that harassed him have solved themselves by simple vanishing; he returns to his early convictions, with the added ripeness of long meditation. He had used the life of the poor for his greatest creative work, and the question of the

growing democracy is the only one that still abides with him in his repose. Everywhere he sees the decay of that natural instinct on which the morality of the world at large must always depend, and in its place an ever-widening spirit of interrogation which only unsettles and sets adrift. "I am no friend of the people," he exclaims, and the words come with a strange insistence from such a man. "As a force, by which the tenor of the time is conditioned, they inspire me with distrust, with fear. . . . Every instinct of my being is anti-democratic, and I dread to think of what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly. . . . Nothing is more rooted in my mind than the vast distinction between the individual and the class." This doubt alone remained to annoy him, but with it he connected the other great movement of the day: "I hate and fear 'science' because of my conviction that, for long to come, if not for ever, it will be the remorseless enemy of mankind." To science he attributed the spread of that half-education which increases the powers of action while lessening the inhibitions of self-knowledge. It was from his close reading of the classics, I think, though he himself does not say so, came his notion of the one only salvation through the aristocratic idea, the essential idea of Greek literature:

> The task before us is no light one. Can we, whilst losing the class, retain the idea it embodied? Can we English, ever so subject to the material, liberate ourselves from that old association, yet guard its meaning in

the sphere of spiritual life? Can we, with eyes which have ceased to look reverently on worn-out symbols, learn to select from among the grey-coated multitude, and place in reverence even higher, him who "holds his patent of nobility straight from Almighty God"? Upon that depends the future of England.

The business of the novelist is with the realities of life, and not with hypotheses; yet one cannot leave Gissing without wishing that he had found strength and occasion to express in fiction these fundamental ideas of his maturity.

MRS. GASKELL

It was an unusual fate that called upon the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, within a period of a few months, to supply the missing conclusions of two such novels as *Denis Duval* and *Wives and Daughters*. The last number of Thackeray's half-told story, with its *cetera valde desiderantur*, appeared in the issue of June, 1864; in the same magazine for January, 1866, Mrs. Gaskell's long contribution came to an abrupt end, fortunately all but finished when her busy hand was stopped. "We are saying nothing now of the merely intellectual qualities displayed in these later works," wrote Frederick Greenwood in his notice of Mrs. Gaskell; "twenty years to come, that may be thought the more important question." Well, just twice twenty years were to elapse before the Master of Peterhouse was to answer that question so happily in the Introductions to her complete works.[1] He has left not a great deal for the critical gleaner to say. There is, in fact, nothing recondite in either the beauties

[1] *The Works of Mrs. Gaskell.* In eight volumes. Knutsford edition. With a General Biographical Introduction, and a Critical Introduction to each volume, by Dr. A. W. Ward, who has received the kind assistance of the Misses Gaskell. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1906.

or the limitations of Mrs. Gaskell's genius, and my desire is merely to invite others to the pleasure these well-edited books have given me. We have all of us read *Cranford*, and some of us *Wives and Daughters;* but how many of the younger generation are familiar with the pathos of *Ruth;* or the deeper pity of the labour tales, *Mary Barton* and *North and South ;* or the mingled satire and regret of *My Lady Ludlow ?* How many are familiar with her riper work—with that humble tragedy of the sea and the moors, *Sylvia's Lovers ;* or that flawless, radiant idyl, *Cousin Phillis ?* And to these must be added the long series of short stories whose names almost had been forgotten.

There are, as may be seen from this list, two main sources of inspiration in Mrs. Gaskell's writing, the labour troubles of the cities and the sequestered peace of the country, corresponding to the divisions of her own life. She was born in London, in 1810, her father, William Stevenson, being a man of some intellectual distinction. But her mother died within a month after the child's birth, and the little Elizabeth grew up with her maternal relatives in Knutsford, a town of Cheshire lying some fifteen miles south of Manchester. Her home here was the house of Mrs. Lumb, her mother's sister ; but she must have seen a good deal of her uncle, Peter Holland, the physician of the town, who is supposed to have furnished the model for Mr. Harrison and for Mr.

Gibson of *Wives and Daughters*. Her grandfather, Samuel Holland, was a gentleman farmer living at Sandle Bridge, two or three miles distant. Here she drew in part her pictures for the Woodley of *Cranford* and for Hope Farm of *Cousin Phillis*. "The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral," she writes of that famous visit of the Cranford ladies to Mr. Holbrook's, which must have been like so many of her own excursions to Grandfather Holland's. "Woodley stood among fields; and there was an old-fashioned garden where roses and currant-bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus formed a pretty background to the pinks and gilly-flowers; there was no drive up to the door. We got out at a little gate, and walked up a straight box-edged path." But the land was not without its heroic traditions. The great Clive had gone to school at Knutsford, was perhaps connected with the Holland family (his mother was a Gaskell), and had certainly spent some of his holidays at Sandle Bridge, where he had displayed his youthful prowess, and alarmed his hosts, by jumping from the round ball of one gate-post to the other. When Mrs. Gaskell came to describe her Hope Farm, she did not forget that famous entrance to her grandfather's place:

> There was a garden between the house and the shady, grassy lane; I afterwards found that this garden was called the court; perhaps because there was a low wall round it, with an iron railing on the top of the wall, and

two great gates between pillars crowned with stone balls, for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front door. It was not the habit of the place to go in either by these great gates or by the front door; the gates, indeed, were locked, as I found, though the door stood wide open. I had to go round by a side-path, slightly worn, on a broad, grassy way, which led past the court-wall, past a horse-mount, half covered with stone-crop and a little wild yellow fumitory, to another door—"the curate," as I found it was termed by the master of the house, while the front door, "handsome and all for show," was termed "the rector."

Woodley and Hope Farm are not quite the same, and neither of them is the exact reproduction of the place visited by the girl Elizabeth, but they show how intimately the recollections of her country life passed into her later work. It is not so stated in the biography, but it would be safe to infer that Samuel Holland was a lover of books, for we remember how Mr. Holbrook read *Locksley Hall* to the ladies in his cluttered library, and how Mr. Holman quoted Virgil in the fields of Hope Farm, when they came upon "a sudden burst of the tawny, ruddy evening landscape."

Such was the serene setting of her early life; to her maturer years came a serenity of another sort. In her twenty-second year she was married in the parish church at Knutsford to the Rev. William Gaskell, joint minister of the Unitarian chapel in Cross Street, Manchester. Mr. Gaskell was a man of large attainments and refinement, who for several years held the post of professor of

English history and literature in Manchester New College. Their home, at No. 84 Plymouth Grove, became a centre of cultivated interests in a community more concerned with the laws of trade than with the canons of taste. But there was no shirking of the more painful realities. As a minister's wife, the poverty and rebellion of those years must have knocked at her doors, and she was not afraid also to face them in their haunts. In particular she saw a good deal of the working people in the company of her friend, Susanna Winkworth, had attended their debates and visited their homes, and knew their grievances and errors. And so, in a season of affliction, she sought naturally to lose her personal grief in this sympathy with the poor. She had already written one or two briefer pieces when, after the death of her infant son, she began her first labour story, *Mary Barton*. This was written in the years 1845-47, and published in 1848—significant dates. Her other labour story, *North and South*, was written as a serial for Dickens' *Household Words*, in 1854-55, and then issued as a complete work. The material was ready to her hand, and, indeed, no one of Mrs. Gaskell's sensitiveness could have lived in the heart of manufacturing England during the "hungry forties" without reflecting the trouble of the times. All during that half century, while the wealth of the country was piling up, there had been recurring periods of extreme depression for the labouring classes.

The Chartist movement beginning in '38; the Anti-Corn-Law League, established by Cobden and Bright, in Manchester, in '39, leading to the repeal of the Corn laws in '46; the failure of the Irish potato crop in '45, sending hordes of poor unskilled Irish to take the place of English workers; the upheaval of '48—these are a few of the familiar dates that mark the epoch. And fiction responded loyally to these popular appeals as any reader of the novels of the day can tell. *Shirley*, published in '49; Disraeli's *Sybil* ('45), *Hard Times* ('54), and a little later *John Halifax, Gentleman* ('57), are names that will occur to every one, and they are but the beginning of the list. We have once more in quite recent years seen this problem of the toiling masses take possession of fiction, but how different is the spirit of the writers then and now!

The chief cause of the evil in Mrs. Gaskell's day was the rapid change in economic conditions due to the newly invented methods of manufacture. Carlyle, in his *Chartism* (1840), stated the case with his usual emphasis and something more than his usual adherence to facts:

> With all this it is consistent that the wages of "skilled labour," as it is called, should in many cases be higher than they ever were: the giant Steam-engine in a giant English Nation will here create a violent demand for labour, and will there annihilate demand. But, alas, the great portion is not skilled; the millions are and must be skill-less, where strength alone is wanted; ploughers, delvers, borers; hewers of wood and drawers of water;

menials of the Steam-engine, only the *chief* menials and immediate *body*-servants of which require skill. English Commerce stretches its fibres over the whole Earth; sensitive literally, nay, quivering in convulsion, to the farthest influences of the Earth. The huge demon of Mechanism smokes and thunders, panting at his great task, in all sections of English land; changing his *shape* like a very Proteus; and infallibly at every change of shape, *oversetting* whole multitudes of workmen, and as if with the waving of his shadow from afar, hurling them asunder, this way and that, in their crowded march and course of work or traffic; so that the wisest no longer knows his whereabout.

That was the main cause, cruel enough in its action, though perhaps unavoidable. But the bitterness of the suffering was magnified by two opposite circumstances. Since Adam Smith's day the so-called "mercantile system" of taxes and restrictions on commerce had been gradually falling into disfavour; but in 1773 Parliament had passed the Corn laws, by which foreign wheat was allowed to enter the country only when the price was high. Despite the distress inflicted by them on the city poor, these laws, until a revolution threatened, were kept in force by the great land-owners who perceived their wealth and power transferring to the manufacturing class and naturally resented the change. On the other hand, the new doctrine of *laissez-faire* which began to govern the manufacturing world, was not without its answering evil. As a revolt from the imbecilities of the "mercantile system," the new economics

was one of the surest steps in advance of the eighteenth century; as the institutor of free trade it was, we may suppose, permanently valuable; but in its moral aspects, as it came to be interpreted by the Manchester school of Cobden and Bright, it was one of the crudest and harshest creations of the human brain. To strip men of all their faculties save those productive commercially, to make cash payment, as Carlyle inveighed, the universal sole nexus of man to man, to find in supply-and-demand a sufficient substitute for duty and mercy—what better name could be given to this than the "dismal science"? The reaction from that heartless trust in *let-alone* is felt to-day in the humanitarian palterings with the laws of retributive justice and in the excesses of Socialism. In Mrs. Gaskell's day hostility to the system could be traced up and down the country in riot and misery, in sullen plottings, and vociferous appeals to Parliament.

And fiction has corresponded to these different conditions. In a word, the elder novelist undertook to awaken a sense of obligation and pity in the strong toward the weak; whereas too often to-day the purpose of the reforming writer is to preach a millennium of brotherly love to be achieved through inflaming the hatred of the poor against the rich. There were exceptions then, of course, as there are now. Rumblings of the purely Jacobin clamour were still heard, as in the imprecations of the Corn Law Rhymer:

Avenge the plunder'd poor, oh Lord!
But not with fire, but not with sword,
Not as at Peterloo they died,
Beneath the hoofs of coward pride.
Avenge our rags, our chains, our sighs,
The famine in our children's eyes!
But not with sword—no, not with fire
Chastise Thou Britain's locustry!
Lord, let them feel Thy heavier ire;
Whip them, oh Lord! with poverty!
Then, cold in soul as coffin'd dust,
Their hearts as tearless, dead, and dry,
Let them in outraged mercy trust,
And *find* that mercy they deny!

But even here the cry is for mercy from above. Carlyle was the prophet of revolt against political indifferentism, and his words might be written down as the motto of much of the labour fiction of the day: "'Guide me, govern me! I am mad, and miserable, and cannot govern myself!' Surely of all 'rights of man,' this right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him, is the indisputablest." To Disraeli this right to be governed took the form of an imaginative restoration of the older hierarchy of society. Such was the "Young England" he called upon in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* and elsewhere. In place of the "Venetian oligarchy" of factious nobles, there was to be a rebalancing of the three estates after the ideal of Bolingbroke and Burke; in place of the Manchester cash-nexus, the weak were to be bound to the strong by loyalty, and the strong

to the weak by duty. Mrs. Gaskell looked for relief rather to the more feminine qualities of the heart. "They'n screwed us down to th' lowest peg, in order to make their great big fortunes, and build their great big houses," cries one of the starving workers, "and we, why we're just clemming, many and many of us. Can you say there's nought wrong in this?" And from this *clemming*—"starving," the dreadful word runs like a chorus through both these novels—grows the moral tragedy of the plots. Thus, John Barton kills the son of his employer, Mr. Carson, driving himself into haunted exile and throwing the suspicion of the murder on the lover of his daughter Mary. The scene of reconciliation, when at last Barton comes home broken by remorse, and the enemies meet face to face in his desolate home, may be quoted both as an illustration of Mrs. Gaskell's creed and as a specimen of her earlier dramatic style:

John himself stood up, stiff and rigid, and replied——

"Mary, wench! I owe him summut. I will go die, where, and as he wishes me. Thou hast said true, I am standing side by side with Death; and it matters little where I spend the bit of time left of life. That time I must pass wrestling with my soul for a character to take into the other world. I'll go where you see fit, sir. He's innocent," faintly indicating Jem, as he fell back in his chair. . . .

But as Mr. Carson was on the point of leaving the house with no sign of relenting about him, he was stopped by John Barton, who had risen once more from his chair, and stood supporting himself on Jem, while he spoke.

"Sir, one word! My hairs are grey with suffering, and yours with years"——

"And have I had no suffering?" asked Mr. Carson, as if appealing for sympathy, even to the murderer of his child.

And the murderer of his child answered to the appeal, and groaned in spirit over the anguish he had caused.

"Have I had no inward suffering to blanch these hairs? Have I not toiled and struggled even to these years with hopes in my heart that all centred in my boy? I did not speak of them, but were they not there? I seemed hard and cold; and so I might be to others, but not to him! —who shall ever imagine the love I bore him? Even he never dreamed how my heart leapt up at the sound of his footstep, and how precious he was to his poor old father. And he is gone—killed—out of the hearing of all loving words—out of my sight for ever. He was my sunshine, and now it is night! Oh, my God! comfort me, comfort me!" cried the old man aloud.

The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears. Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for little Tom, in years so long gone by that they seemed like another life?

The mourner before him was no longer the employer, a being of another race, eternally placed in antagonistic attitude, . . . no longer the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor and desolate old man.

And so the chastened master of men, now but a man himself, goes out to ponder on the causes of suffering and hatred, and becomes in his own way a reformer. His new desire was "that a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men; . . . and to have them bound to their employers

by ties of respect and affection, not by mere money bargains alone; in short, to acknowledge the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties."—How strangely old-fashioned the phrases sound; how far we have removed our theories from that simple trust! Turn from Mrs. Gaskell to the bleak skepticism of Gissing's *Nether World* or the chapters of *Life's Morning* that run parallel in theme with *Mary Barton;* or compare the doctrine of class consciousness so diligently proclaimed by some of our living American novelists—and how different the world we are in! What novelist to-day would dare to indulge in a sentimental outcry to the rich, like that of Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop* to "those who rule the destinies of nations"! Whether economically or not, the advantage artistically was certainly with our elders. Through their appeal and warning we seem to hear, in tones confused it may be by the perplexities of long experience and by much half-knowledge, the cry of the Greek stage, *Alas, oh generations of men!* and of all great literature; and the reader is softened and broadened by association with the ancient pity of human life. Our modern fiction of the Zola–Tolstoy school may be more effective, though even this is doubtful, in immediate reform, but to the reader it brings only a harsh contraction of spirit, and its end is in hatred and revolution and palsy and decay.

The moral of *North and South* is the same as

that of *Mary Barton*, with, perhaps, a stronger touch of emphasis on the hardships undergone by the masters; and the reconciliation comes about by the more orthodox means of marriage. But it must not be supposed that the didactic purpose is unpleasantly prominent in either tale. Mrs. Gaskell wrote, not because she had a lesson to inculcate, but because her heart was moved by the blind suffering about her and her mind absorbed by the problem of these contending characters. Nor is the colour of the stories one of unrelieved darkness. Especially there is a play of light in the later book, in the pretty opening idyl at Helstone, amid the New Forest, "like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems," made up of "the church and a few houses near it on the green—cottages, rather—with roses growing all over them." And when the heroine is transplanted from this southern home to the grime and stress of a great northern factory town, there is the contrast of two civilisations, meeting and contending for her soul—the old ideal of leisurely manners and the modern of stripped efficiency. And Margaret Hale herself is one of the heroines of fiction we cherish as we cherish the memory of women known in our youth. As has been said by another, we can almost see her, as poor Bessy saw her in a dream, "coming swiftly towards me, wi' yo'r hair blown back wi' the very swiftness o' the motion, a little standing off like; and the white, shining dress on yo've

getten to wear." We can see her proudly rebuking Mr. Thornton, when he presumes on her defence of his life, as if she had acted out of personal regard for him. Mr. Thornton himself, the self-made master who resents any interference with the control of his money and his men, is an ably-drawn character. The bending of his stern spirit to human charity toward his workmen, by his love for Margaret, is told with consummate skill, and yet in the end the reciprocal yielding of Margaret has a touch of something not entirely agreeable; beauty such as hers needs to be enveloped by strength, but by more of fineness too.

In one respect Margaret, like the other heroines of Mrs. Gaskell's books, is sketched with a touch less feminine than masculine. They are all creatures of passion, yet we feel that their choice in love is not so much personal and voluntary as the result of that life-force which beats through the world, and of which they are the passive instruments. They are like vessels charged with a subtle and dangerous fluid; and this, I take it, is rather man's way of contemplating women. And when, as it does in *Sylvia's Lovers*, this unregarding force takes for its vehicle a girl made up of little vanities, what can the consequence be but a life broken by the clashing of its own strength and weakness—perhaps in the end a pathetic self-abnegation? One feels this union of traits at the first glimpse of Sylvia as she comes down from

her hill-home to the sea-town—in her childlike delight at the thought of buying a new cloak, in the nimble vitality of her body. She was wilful, as such women are, but she was to learn many things—to learn the nature of the forces that played upon her. "It 's not in me to forgive; I sometimes think it 's not in me to forget," she exclaims; and again: "I 'm sick o' men and their cruel, deceitful ways."

And with this portrayal of passion there goes an entire chastity of language—the *pudor* of true art which would represent the beauty and the devastating attraction of this force without evoking the corresponding physical emotion in the reader or beholder. I happened to be reading *Eugénie Grandet* at the same time with *Sylvia's Lovers*, and I was struck by a difference in this respect. Eugénie is a noble example of the pure heroine whose passive nature is possessed by the blind force; she is of the large, still type, more like Phillis and Ruth than Sylvia, but akin to them all in destiny. There is in Balzac's portrayal of her beauty a freshness and chastity not common in his books, or, indeed, appropriate to most of his women; yet even here he forgets himself and must insinuate how she would have appealed to the Parisian *roué*. It is a fault in art, for in the crowded impressions that come from reading such a description the brain fails to distinguish between what is ascribed to the woman herself and what is said about her. Richardson,

for example, learned this lesson of delicacy in the interval between *Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe;* parts of the first work are nasty, though written with the best intentions, whereas I cannot recall in all the similar situations of *Clarissa* a single scene that produces a physical disquiet. Now in this point the purity of Mrs. Gaskell's own mind was a safeguard against error. Read the pages where Philip watches his Sylvia at the spinning wheel, or where Kinraid observes her knitting, and again at her household work, moving "out of light into shade, out of shadow into the broad firelight"—the nature of her attraction is made sufficiently clear, but there is never a disturbing suggestion.

The scene of *Sylvia's Lovers* is a Yorkshire whaling village, where the bleak moors roll down to the coast. Always the sound of water is in the air, the sound of "the waves lapping against the shelving shore," the lights and murmurs of the sea of Aphrodite, though under a cold northern sky. But for the first of her idyls she turned to her own home in the quiet country just bordering on Lancashire, and it is well known that *Cranford* is an idealised, or etherealised rather, picture of Knutsford. Of the book there is no need to say anything. It was published next after *Mary Barton*, and could scarcely have been written without the experience that gives force to the earlier novel. For, if we analyse the charm of *Cranford*, it will be found to depend largely, I think, on a feeling of unreality, or, more

precisely, of proximity to the greater realities of Manchester. This contrast was a part of Mrs. Gaskell's own life; she made use of it deliberately in *North and South*, and it gives their peculiar tone to the idyllic tales, as may be seen clearly enough by comparing her country with Jane Austen's. What impresses one in Miss Austen's books is a feeling of stability; Governments may fall in London, but any change in the manners and occupations of this provincial folk is inconceivable. In *Cranford* just the contrary is true. Here the grace is of something that has survived into an alien age, and is about to vanish away; there is a tremulous fragility in its beauty.

Cranford is flawless in a way, but not more so than *Cousin Phillis*, while its colours are altogether paler. Indeed, one scarcely knows how to praise the gem-like beauty of the later pastoral without using language that might seem to place it too high as a literary work. "A Protestant clergyman is perhaps the finest subject for a modern idyl that can be found," wrote Goethe of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the words are even more applicable to Mrs. Gaskell's minister Holman. "He appears, like Melchizedec, to combine the characters of priest and king. Devoted to agriculture, the most innocent of all terrestrial conditions of man, he is almost always engaged in the same occupations, and confined to the circle of his family connections. He is a father, a master, and a cultivator; and, by the union of these characters, a true member of

society. On these worldly, but pure and noble foundations his higher vocations rest." There could be no better comment on the meeting of the hero with Phillis and her father, the farmer-preacher :

"Well, my lass, this is Cousin Manning, I suppose. Wait a minute, young man, and I 'll put on my coat and give you a decorous and formal welcome. But——Ned Hall, there ought to be a water-furrow across this land ; it 's a nasty, stiff, clayey, dauby bit of ground, and thou and I must fall to, come next Monday—I beg your pardon, Cousin Manning—and there 's old Jem's cottage wants a bit of thatch ; you can do that job to-morrow, while I am busy." Then suddenly changing the tone of his deep voice to an odd suggestion of chapels and preachers, he added : "Now I will give out the psalm, 'Come all harmonious tongues,' to be sung to 'Mount Ephraim' tune."

He lifted his spade in his hand, and began to beat time with it ; the two labourers seemed to know both words and music, though I did not ; and so did Phillis ; her rich voice followed her father's, as he set the time ; and the men came in with more uncertainty, but still harmoniously. Phillis looked at me once or twice, with a little surprise at my silence ; but I did not know the words. There we five stood, bare-headed, excepting Phillis, in the tawny stubble-field, from which all the shocks of corn had not yet been carried—a dark wood on one side, where the wood-pigeons were cooing ; blue distance, seen through the ash-trees, on the other. Somehow, I think that, if I had known the words, and could have sung, my throat would have been choked up by the feeling of the unaccustomed scene.

The hymn was ended and the men had drawn off, before I could stir. I saw the minister beginning to put on

his coat, and looking at me with friendly inspection in his gaze, before I could rouse myself.

It is a rare scene, whose dignity verges on the humorous, and which only a writer conscious of her art would have dared venture upon. It strikes the keynote of the book, but for completion there is needed that picture of Phillis in the first flush of her love for "Cousin Manning's" friend, standing under the budding branches of the grey trees, and whistling with the birds in unconscious delight. It is a fact of pathetic significance that Cousin Phillis did not know the meaning of her joy, but should understand so well the reason of her sorrow when the turn came.

In the end one is tempted to ask why this pastoral tale has failed to establish itself among our classics. One compares it, perhaps, with *The Vicar of Wakefield;* one tests the scene of Minister Holman in the fields with that of Parson Primrose drinking tea with his family where his "predecessor had made a seat, overshadowed by a hedge of hawthorne and honeysuckle." Why is it that the later book, with all its overtones of beauty and sentiment, does not rank with its plainer rival? We are more deeply stirred by the events of *Cousin Phillis* than by that of *The Vicar*, yet we feel that a hundred years from now Goldsmith's work will be read with the same kind of interest as to-day, when Mrs. Gaskell's shall be all but forgotten. May it not be just the emotional qualities of *Cousin Phillis* which prompt one to give it

so brief a period of life? Somehow the sentimental appeal has a dull trick of losing its effect in an astonishingly short time, as any one can discover by reading the chapters of Miss Burney's *Cecilia* over which Mrs. Gaskell's parents, no doubt, like others of their generation, shed copious tears; whereas Goldsmith's just mixture of satire and sentiment, his freedom from superfluous baggage, his eighteenth-century cleanness of style, have the preservative quality of Attic salt.

But these are idle surmises. It is enough that the radiant beauty of *Cousin Phillis* and the fuller charms of *Wives and Daughters* are still contemporaneous to us, and that we can now enjoy them in their excellent new dress.

PHILIP FRENEAU

It is a somewhat disturbing thought that the laborious publications most prized by scholars are just those which are likely to deprive an author of a real public. To take recent examples, there is Mrs. Paget Toynbee's superb Walpole in sixteen volumes, the Hazlitt in twelve, the Thoreau in twenty. How many of those who stand between the haphazard and the professional reader, thinking they must have the best, will, if they can afford it, buy the bulky Hazlitt, will scan its pages, packed with ephemeral salvage, place it on a shelf, and never again take it down? They would actually read the old Bohn edition, in its seven comfortable volumes. And this new Freneau[1] will, I fear, suffer the same fate, with the additional drawback that no popular selection of his works is available. I would not appear ungrateful: these elaborate editions are highly desirable, highly useful; but why does not some enterprising publisher give us also the books that we most urgently want—a selected library, for instance, of the literature of the American Revolution. Six or eight compact,

[1] *The Poems of Philip Freneau, Poet of the American Revolution.* Edited for the Princeton Historical Association by Fred Lewis Pattee. 3 vols. Princeton: The University Library, 1902–7.

uniform volumes, well printed, judiciously annotated, would suffice. One volume might contain the important political speeches of the day, another the more interesting familiar letters, another a taste of the Tory poets. Of single authors, two of Huguenot descent would necessarily be included: Crèvecœur, who represents the moderate party, crushed between the fanatics of both extremes, and whose charming *Letters from an American Farmer* were brought out the other day in an excellent reprint[1]; and Freneau, the shrill spokesman of the ultra-Democrats. Two volumes might well be set apart for Freneau, one for a selection of his prose and his political poems, the other for his lyrical and humorous pieces; they would afford a richer mine of reading than is commonly supposed, and would offer a document of rare historic value.

It has been pointed out more than once that Freneau was a half-hearted pioneer in that "misty mid region of Weir," from which Poe, later on, was to bring back such astounding reports. An idle fancy might even look for a parallel in the circumstances of their frustrated ambitions, and might stop to compare the death of Poe with that of the older poet, who wandered one night into a bog on his way home and was

[1] *Letters from an American Farmer.* By J. Hector St. John Crèvecœur. With a Prefatory Note by W. P. Trent, and an Introduction by Ludwig Lewisohn. New York: Fox, Duffield, & Co., 1904.

found the next day dying of exposure—intoxicated, it was rumoured, although that ugly tradition is denied. Freneau, it need not be said, suffered from no such disabilities of the flesh as Poe, and the only point of the comparison would lie in the tragedy of their genius hemmed in on every side by prosaic surroundings. The later poet, at least, "amid wreck and sorrow," knew the solace of perfect expression, whereas the continual complaint of Freneau is that his faculty of song has been baffled by lack of sympathy. If there is anything real in the years that follow a man's death, Freneau's was the harder fate. Not a little of his best prose and verse was contributed to the *United States Magazine*, a monthly of Philadelphia, which ran through the year 1779, and then, like so many of the periodicals on which Poe was to lavish his powers, came to a full stop. A large class of Americans, said the editor in his valedictory, "inhabit the region of stupidity, and cannot bear to have the tranquillity of their repose disturbed by the villainous shock of a book. Reading is to them the worst of all torments, and I remember very well that at the commencement of the work it was their language, 'Art thou come to torment us before the time?' We will now say to them, 'Sleep on and take your rest.'" And Freneau himself in his verse never misses an opportunity of girding at the unimaginative age and people into which he was born.

"Before the time" might be taken as the text of Freneau's life. His family was of Huguenot descent, his grandfather having emigrated to New York in 1707. When Philip was born, in 1752, they were prosperous merchants in this city, with something of an estate in New Jersey. In his sixteenth year he went to Princeton, then under the able management of President Witherspoon. In the same class with him was James Madison, whose friendship he retained through life, while just below him were William Bradford and Aaron Burr. Poetry and politics were in the air, and Freneau got his first taste of satire in the rhyming contests between the Whig and Cliosophic societies, which were founded in his sophomore and junior years. Miniature epics, too, such as *The History of the Prophet Jonah*, and solemn dialogues, such as *The Pyramids of Egypt*, with the Horatian *Debemur morti, nos nostraque* duly inscribed above, were not beyond his aspiration in those years, and were printed in the later collections of his works. They are really not so dull as might be supposed. We may smile at the old-fashioned manner of such verses as these, perhaps the earliest of his that have been preserved:

In ages past, when smit with warmth sublime,
Their bards foretold the dark events of time,
And piercing forward through the mystic shade,
Kings yet to come, and chiefs unborn survey'd,
Amittar's son perceiv'd, among the rest,
The mighty flame usurp his labouring breast. . . .

but in the work of how many sophomores, aged sixteen, would you find to-day this note of intellectual self-respect? After leaving college he taught school for a while, first at Flatbush, L. I., and then under H. H. Brackenridge, at Princess Anne, Md. In 1775 he is back in New York, writing political pamphlets and poems. He was launched in his career: hatred of the English and of the American Tories was his never-failing theme down to his death in 1832. It is not necessary here to recall the vicissitudes of his fortune; the various papers he edited, his political animosities, his alternations of literary work with cruising the seas and with farming. "The old hag Necessity has got such a prodigious gripe of me!" he wrote to Madison in 1772, and he never for long shook her off. Those who care to follow the adventures of a poet in the troubled days of "this bard-baiting clime"—and the story is well worth reading—may turn to Professor Pattee's admirable Life in the present edition.

Of two periods in his career, however, a word must be said. In November of 1775 he sailed for Santa Cruz with a West Indian gentleman, who owned large estates on the island. During the voyage the mate of the vessel died, and Freneau was put in his place. A good deal of his life thereafter was passed on shipboard as mate and master, so that he is one of the few poets who write of the sea with complete knowledge of the trade. It was no land-lubber who made the odes,

On the Death of Captain Biddle, on *Captain Jones's Invitation*, and *On the Memorable Victory*. Nor was his experience of the tropics without influence. The three long poems, *Santa Cruz*, *The House of Night*, and *The Jamaica Funeral*, composed during his visit of two years to the island, are distinctly different in tone from the rest of his work. There is more colour in them, more warmth of imagination. In the midst of much description of the ordinary amateurish sort, one comes upon a perfect image in a single line:

> Fair Santa Cruz, arising, laves her waist;

or upon a stanza marred only by his inveterate taste for adjectives in "y":

> Among the shades of yonder whispering grove
> The green palmettos mingle, tall and fair,
> That ever murmur, and forever move,
> Fanning with wavy bough the ambient air;—

or upon a whole passage of haunting, if imperfect, beauty, ending with a reflection that foreshadows, so to speak, the most famous line he was afterwards to write:

> Along the shore a wondrous flower is seen,
> Where rocky ponds receive the surging wave;
> Some drest in yellow, some array'd in green,
> Beneath the water their gay branches lave.
>
> This mystic plant, with its bewitching charms,
> Too surely springs from some enchanted bower;
> Fearful it is, and dreads impending harms,
> And *Animal* the natives call the flower.

From the smooth rock its little branches rise,
The objects of thy view, and that alone ;
Feast on its beauties with thy ravish'd eyes,
But aim to touch it, and—the flower is gone.

Nay, if thy shade but intercept the beam
That gilds their boughs beneath the briny lake,
Swift they retire, like a deluded dream,
And even a shadow for destruction take.

Something more than southern warmth enters into the stanzas of *The House of Night*. It is the fury of the sudden tropic storm that he tries to express in such lines as these :

Lights in the air like burning stars were hurl'd,
Dogs howl'd, heaven murmur'd, and the tempest blew,
The red half-moon peep'd from behind a cloud
As if in dread the amazing scene to view.

Poe himself never imagined anything more grotesquely weird than this account of the death and burial of Death, nor ever composed lines of more sombre magnificence than a few of those scattered through Freneau's poem ; the pity of it is that so much power of imagination should have been wasted through the poet's provincial training. The *genre* has its risks for the most wary hand, and how should Freneau escape without a fall? We hardly know whether to smile or shudder when he writes :

Each horrid face a grisly mask conceal'd,
Their busy eyes shot terror to my soul
As now and then, by the pale lanthorn's glare,
I saw them for their parted friend condole ;

there is, unfortunately, less room for hesitation when he concludes this grewsome burial of Death:

> That done, they placed the carcase in the tomb,
> To dust and dull oblivion now resign'd,
> Then turn'd the chariot tow'rd the House of Night,
> Which soon flew off, and left no trace behind.

These poems were written during the first years of the Revolution, and far away from the scenes of battle; but Freneau was to learn the meaning of war at closer range. On one of his voyages to Santa Cruz, in 1780, his vessel was captured by a British frigate, and crew and passengers were carried to New York. Here for a while he was confined in the horrible prison ships, and immediately on being released by exchange he set himself to describe his experience in rhyme. If he had railed at Great Britain before, he now screamed:

> Weak as I am, I 'll try my strength to-day,
> And my best arrows at these hell-hounds play,
> To future years one scene of death prolong,
> And hang them up to infamy, in song.

The descriptive verses and satires that resulted from his travels were the strongest and most telling he ever wrote; as much cannot be said for the product of another period of his life. In August, 1791, he was appointed clerk for foreign languages by Jefferson, then Secretary of State, and went to Philadelphia to live. Two months later he issued the first number of the *National*

Gazette, a semi-weekly paper devoted to the party of Jefferson against that of Hamilton, not without side thrusts at Washington, and to the favouring of French revolutionary democracy against British monarchy. That was not a day when political writers disguised their feelings, and between the *National Gazette* and *Fenno's Gazette of the United States* there arose as pretty a war of words as one might wish to hear. The attacks of the Federalists are summed up in this anonymous note inserted by Hamilton in *Fenno's Gazette*, July 25, 1792 :

> The Editor of the *National Gazette* receives a salary from Government :
>
> Quere—Whether this salary is paid him for *translations;* or for *publications*, the design for which is to vilify those to whom the voice of the people has committed the administration of our public affairs—to oppose the measures of Government, and, by false insinuations, to disturb the public peace ?
>
> In common life it is thought ungrateful for a man to bite the hand that puts bread in his mouth; but if a man is hired to do it, the case is altered.

Freneau swore that neither the " *Gazette* nor the editor thereof was ever directed, controlled, or attempted to be influenced in any manner, either by the Secretary of State, or any of his friends " ; and Jefferson in a letter to Washington made practically the same protestation. Professor Pattee inclines to defend Freneau through this whole episode, and certainly his virulent abuse can be matched, almost if not quite, by the diatribes of his enemies. On

the other hand, it is not easy to defend him against Hamilton's charge, however indirect his relations with Jefferson may have been. His reputation in the end suffers as does that of all barkers at the heels of those who are trying in perilous times to establish order: to Washington he was "that rascal Freneau," to President Dwight he seemed "a mere incendiary, or rather as a despicable tool of bigger incendiaries"; he did not belong to what the Greeks in their days of faction used to call the *agathoi*, the good.

As for Freneau, the writer, those who expect to find in him anything more than a frustrated poet, a poet of hints and anticipations, will be disappointed; but to those who approach him in the right spirit, he will afford a genuine interest. There is a certain charm, a melancholy charm, if you will, in catching the slender tones of his lyric moods here and there through the noise and bustle of his political writings. And often in these notes one detects strange presage of the future. Sometimes these prophetic hints take a definite form, as in that verse of *The Indian Burying Ground*—the most famous he wrote—which Campbell appropriated bodily: "The hunter and the deer a shade," and which Hazlitt, in his *Table Talk*, misquoting as "a hunter of shadows, himself a shade," attributed to Homer's account of Orion. Another line of our poet's, "They took the spear—but left the shield," was with the change of "took" to "snatched," borrowed by Scott, who knew

Freneau's work well enough to call *Eutaw Springs* "as fine a thing as there is of the kind in the language." And a poetess of Britain went so far as to dignify the whole of one of his poems with her name. But the real anticipations of Freneau were rather his own outreachings after the romanticism that was preparing in England. *On Amanda's Singing Bird*, for instance, sounds like a faint prelude to Blake. Other poems point further into the future. A set of verses on *The Power of Fancy*, written in 1770, has a distinct suggestion of Keats's "Ever let the Fancy roam," which dates at least forty-eight years later. Another poem, *The Wild Honey Suckle*, perhaps the most nearly flawless he ever wrote, combines in its rather languid beauty something of Wordsworth's moralising love of the less honoured flowers with Keats's relish of fragility. It is brief enough to quote entire:

Fair flower, that dost so comely grow,
Hid in this silent, dull retreat,
Untouched thy honied blossoms blow,
Unseen thy little branches greet:
No roving foot shall crush thee here,
No busy hand provoke a tear.

By Nature's self in white arrayed,
She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,
And planted here the guardian shade,
And sent soft waters murmuring by;
Thus quietly thy summer goes,
Thy days declining to repose.

From morning suns and evening dews
At first thy little being came:

If nothing once, you nothing lose,
For when you die you are the same ;
The space between is but an hour,
The frail duration of a flower.

Not flawless, for even a clever journeyman's hand could alter a word here and there for the better ; not great in the sense that Wordsworth's and Keats's best work is great; colourless as a whole, yet with a clear, unearthly loveliness of its own. And the last stanza, despite the false "thy" in the second line and the slightly imperfect rhymes, would do honour to any poet of the past century. It has the slender brittleness of a costly vase, marred in the burning.

But Freneau's chief affiliations in the future are undoubtedly with Poe. No one could overlook that quality in such a poem as *The House of Night;* it is no less unmistakable in separate verses and stanzas scattered throughout his works. When he bids farewell to Columbus, in his poem of 1774, he dismisses the discoverer :

To shadowy forms, and ghosts, and sleepy things.

In an earlier poem he writes, in somewhat boyish fashion :

Now, tho' late, returning home,
Lead me to Belinda's tomb ;
Let me glide as well as you
Through the shroud and coffin too,

And behold, a moment, there,
All that once was good and fair—
Who doth here so soundly sleep?
Shall we break this prison deep?

Is not this in the very taste of *The Sleeper* although without Poe's power to touch the reluctant nerve of awe? To follow this vein of frustrated romanticism through his writings is as if we should meet with a Poe who had been snatched into the turmoil of abolitionism and the civil war, and all his music set a-jangle by hate. Freneau, as I have said, was fully conscious of this thwarting bias of the times:

On these bleak climes by Fortune thrown,
Where rigid Reason reigns alone,
Where lovely Fancy has no sway,
Nor magic forms about us play,
Nor nature takes her summer hue—
Tell me, what has the muse to do?

An age employed in edging steel
Can no poetic raptures feel?
No solitude's attracting power,
No leisure of the noon-day hour,
No shaded stream, no quiet grove,
Can this fantastic century move.

The muse of love in no request—
Go—try your fortune with the rest,
One of the nine you should engage,
To meet the follies of the age.

On one, we fear, your choice must fall—
The least engaging of them all—

Her visage stern—an angry style—
A clouded brow—malicious smile—
A mind on murdered victims placed—
She, only she, can please the taste!

It is true that a certain inclination toward satire showed itself from the beginning in Freneau's mind, side by side with his lyrical moods, and needed only the impulse of circumstances to develop. By nature, however, this satirical strain was of the more humane sort, which sends us to the future for comparisons rather than to the past. Thus, the earliest of these poems, *The Adventures of Simon Swaugum, a Village Merchant*, would require only a little more avoirdupois in the rhythm, a little more of psychological antithesis, to take its place among Crabbe's *Tales;* it contains, in fact, bits of *genre* painting which might be passed upon any but the most knowing as actually Crabbe's. Where he differs from the English humourist he tends to forestall the lighter, swifter manner of Lowell and Holmes. Now *Swaugum* was written in 1768 and printed in 1792; *The Library*, Crabbe's first important publication, appeared in 1781, and the *Tales* not until 1812. To appreciate Freneau's originality it must also be remembered that in 1782 John Trumbull, in his *M'Fingal*, was still trying to reproduce the form and wit of Butler's *Hudibras*, tinctured, perhaps, with the more contemporary spirit of Churchill. *Swaugum*, with two or three other *genre* tales, notably *The Expedition of Timothy Taurus, As-*

trologer, and *Slender's Journey*, creates a regret that Freneau did not leave a complete picture of American society in this humorous-satiric vein. For, after all, it is not the poet of purest aspiration, nor the harsh denouncer of crime, that hands down his age to us as a breathing human reality; not Virgil or Juvenal, but Horace. It is by his foibles man lives for posterity; his greater virtues and vices make of him an example, not a companion.

But this kindlier satire was swallowed up in the passions of the Revolution, and Freneau produced a long series of dialogues, declamations, and caustic stanzas against poor King George and his servants. Occasionally there is a grudging humour in the ridicule; oftener mere blank invective. Far the strongest of these poems is the lurid account of his detention on *The British Prison Ship*, already mentioned:

> Hunger and thirst to work our woe combine,
> And mouldy bread, and flesh of rotten swine,
> The mangled carcase, and the battered brain,
> The doctor's poison, and the captain's cane,
> The soldier's musquet, and the steward's debt,
> The evening shackle, and the noon-day threat.

Of all his ills the doctor's poison seems to have been the hardest to bear:

> He on his charge the healing work begun
> With antimonial mixtures, by the tun,
> Ten minutes was the time he deign'd to stay,

The time of grace allotted once a day—
He drencht us well with bitter draughts, 't is true,
Nostrums from hell, and cortex from Peru—
Some with his pills he sent to Pluto's reign,
And some he blister'd with his flies of Spain;
His cream of Tartar walk'd its deadly round,
Till the lean patient at the potion frown'd,
And swore that hemlock, death, or what you will,
Were nonsense to the drugs that stuff'd his bill.—
On those refusing he bestow'd a kick,
Or menaced vengeance with his walking-stick;
Here uncontroll'd he exercised his trade,
And grew experienced by the deaths he made;
By frequent blows we from his cane endured
He killed at least as many as he cured;
On our lost comrades built his future fame,
And scatter'd fate, where'er his footsteps came.

That is legitimate and effective satire; the indignation of the poet is fitted to the abject offensiveness of his theme. But too often he falls into mere shrewish vituperation:

Said Jove with a smile—
"Columbia shall never be ruled by an isle. . . .
Then cease your endeavours, ye vermin of Britain."
(And here, in derision, their island he spit on) . . .

There is more of the kind, which I shame to repeat, as Freneau himself was confessedly half-ashamed to write. And indeed these explosions of poetic rage have a sad way of losing their force with time, and degenerating into mere ill temper; for what is George III. to you and me that we should understand this hatred? It needs genius

to be a good hater in literature. And if we turn with weariness from this scolding of the English, we are affected with something akin to distress at his railing against his own compatriots, Tory and Federalist:

> What is a Tory? Heavens and earth reveal!
> What strange blind monster does that name conceal?
> There! there he stands—for Augury prepare,
> Come lay his heart and inmost entrails bare,
> I, by the forelock, seize the Stygian hound;
> You bind his arms and bind the dragon down.
> Surgeon, attend with thy dissecting knife,
> Part, part the sutures of his brazen skull,
> Hard as a rock, impenetrably dull.
> Hold out his brain, and let his brethren see
> That tortoise brain, no larger than a pea——
> Come, rake his entrails, whet thy knife again,
> Let 's see what evils threat the next campaign.

In that slough of civil discord were sunk all his raptures of liberty and his visions of *The Rising Glory of America*. For not the least of his anticipations was his prophecy of America's empire, and the conscious assumption within himself of so many of the traits of the practical calculating American mind, side by side with its thin mysticism; as if the temperaments of Poe and Franklin were united in one person. Here you shall read lines in glorification of commerce and science, such as our national poet to-day, if such existed, might write; here you shall see the past disparaged in the classics, and that self-flattering absorption in the present which has sapped the very

roots of the New World's imagination. And here too is the fullest expression of that spirit of rebellion and mutual distrust in which the country was unfortunately, if necessarily, founded, and which has clung to it like an inherited taint in the blood, marring the harmony of its development, and suffering a partial expiation in the calamities of the civil war. There is a lesson for us to-day, and, in more ways than one, a little of humiliation, in the career of our first poet.

But let us rather take leave of Freneau in a different frame of mind. In 1798 he gave up active participation in editing, and retired to the family estate at Mount Pleasant, N. J., where he passed the remaining thirty-four years of his life. Politics were not entirely forgotten, and for a while he contributed to the Philadelphia *Aurora* and other papers a series of amusing letters which were afterwards brought out in book form—the best of his prose writings. But for the most part his time was given to farming in a half-hearted way, and to composing verses under the shelter of a grove that had been started by his father. "It was a complete grove of locust trees," writes his daughter, "surrounding a house grown old [it was burnt to the ground in 1815] with its time-worn owner, his venerable mother, and maiden sister beloved and respected for her many virtues." Professor Pattee gives a happy picture of the poet in his declining age. He was fond of feeding the farm animals, but, as his daughter says, "when the season came

for slaughtering the porkers, he generally managed it so as to have some business in New York, and he was usually absent when poultry was wanted for dinner." One day he and his wife found a slave asleep in the field, and Mrs. Freneau took up the man's hoe, saying she would show him how to work. Her only success was to cut down a hill of the young corn, whereupon the slave chuckled in triumph: "Ho, ho, Missie Freneau, if that 's the way you hoe, the corn 'll never grow." "No wonder the farm does n't pay," she exclaimed in disgust, "when even the slaves talk in rhymes!" Of the appearance of the poet in these latter years we get the best description from Dr. John W. Francis in Duyckinck's *Cyclopædia of American Literature:*

He was somewhat below the ordinary height; in person thin, yet muscular, with a firm step, though a little inclined to stoop; his countenance wore traces of care, yet lightened with intelligence as he spoke; he was mild in enunciation, neither rapid nor slow, but clear, distinct, and emphatic. His forehead was rather beyond the medium elevation, his eyes a dark grey, occupying a socket deeper than common; his hair must have once been beautiful, it was now thinned and of an iron grey. He was free of all ambitious displays; his habitual expression was pensive. His dress might have passed for that of a farmer. New York, the city of his birth, was his most interesting theme; his collegiate career with Madison, next. His story of many of his occasional poems was quite romantic. As he had at command types and a printing press, when an incident of moment in the Revolution occurred, he would retire for composition, or find shelter under the

shade of some tree, indite his lyrics, repair to the press, set up his types, and issue his productions. There was no difficulty in versification with him. I told him what I had heard Jeffrey, the Scotch Reviewer, say of his writings, that the time would arrive when his poetry, like that of Hudibras, would command a commentator like Gray.

That learned commentator has not yet appeared, and is scarcely needed; but it is agreeable to think of the old poet, in his not ignoble retirement from the world, hearing such dearly-earned praise and finding in the future a compensation for the harsh treatment of the past. Princeton has done well to honour one of the most distinguished of her sons by publishing his principal poems in substantial form.

THOREAU'S JOURNAL

TWENTY volumes of Thoreau[1] make a pretty large showing for a man who had only a scant handful of ideas, and, in particular, the thought of labouring through the fourteen volumes of the Journal, now for the first time published complete, may well appal the sturdiest reader. It cannot be denied that the bulk of these note-books have no interest except for the confirmed nature-worshipper, and, in part, I suspect, little even for him. Most of the memorable reflections and descriptive passages had already been transferred to the regular books and lectures; what remains is made up largely of trivial daily memoranda, often written down in the field, and then copied out at home for more convenient reference. But there are recompenses for the wary reader who has learnt the art of skipping; scattered at random through the pages he will discover fragments of magic description, shrewd bookish criticisms, glimpses of serene vision, the old familiar thoughts struck out in fresh language. Thus a certain largeness of outlook seems to be added to Thoreau's known feeling toward the humanitarians when we come across these words, written in

[1] *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau.* Walden Edition. Twenty volumes. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1906.

1842: "The sudden revolutions of these times and this generation have acquired a very exaggerated importance. They do not interest me much, for they are not in harmony with the longer periods of nature. The present, in any aspect in which it can be presented to the smallest audience, is always mean. God does not sympathise with the popular movements." And for description, where will one turn for a more superbly Rabelaisian picture than this wassail scene of the woods:

And then the frogs, bullfrogs; they are the more sturdy spirits of ancient wine-bibbers and wassailers, still unrepentant, trying to sing a catch in their Stygian lakes. They would fain keep up the hilarious good fellowship and all the rules of their old round tables, but they have waxed hoarse and solemnly grave and serious their voices, mocking at mirth, and their wine has lost its flavour and is only liquor to distend their paunches; and never comes sweet intoxication to drown the memory of the past, but mere saturation and waterlogged dulness and distension. Still the most aldermanic, with his chin upon a pad, which answers for a napkin to his drooling chaps, under the eastern shore quaffs a deep draught of the once scorned water, and passes round the cup with the ejaculation *tr-r-r-r-r-oonk*, *tr-r-r-r-r-oonk*, *tr-r-r-r-oonk!* and straightway comes over the water from some distant cove the selfsame password, where the next in seniority and girth has gulped down to his mark; and when the strain has made the circuit of the shores, then ejaculates the master of ceremonies with satisfaction *tr-r-r-r-oonk!* and each in turn repeats the sound, down to the least distended, leakiest, flabbiest paunched, that

there be no mistake; and the bowl goes round again, until the sun dispels the morning mist, and only the patriarch is not under the pond, but vainly bellowing *troonk* from time to time, pausing for a reply.

The scene was written while he was living on the banks of Walden, and afterwards copied, with a few unimportant changes, into his book. It is but one of a hundred examples showing how the essence of his diaries was pressed into that and his other works. It is an example, too, of the peculiarly happy inspiration that other poets than Aristophanes have won from the sullen batrachian song. Thoreau returns to the same theme more than once. "There is the faintest possible mist over the pond holes," he writes six years later, "where the frogs are eructating, like the falling of huge drops, the bursting of mephitic air-bubbles rising from the bottom, a sort of blubbering —such conversations as I *have* heard between men, a belching conversation, expressing a sympathy of stomachs and abdomens." The image of these grotesque revellers haunts him, and has haunted others, as if it were an obscene parody of the fabled singing of the poets at the well of Hippocrene.

Et veterem in limo ranæ cecinere querellam—

the very word *querella* is sacred to the denizens of Helicon.

Such isolated examples of wit and poetry we stumble upon in the Journal, and take our reward

for pages of triviality. And, from another point of view, by overlooking the question of immediate interest altogether, we may find a more solid profit in these volumes. As a record written in large of the life of which *Walden* expresses, so to speak, the quintessential meaning, these private and garrulous memoranda have a real value of corroboration. They show the utter sincerity of the man; in their large placid current we perceive the stillness of his nature, and are further assured that his dramatic escape to the woods was not a bit of posing, nor a calculated exploit for "copy," but an experience quite harmonious with the tenor of his days. And this knowledge is precious; for the distinction of Thoreau lies just herein, that what other men were preaching, he lived. In transcendental thought he was, if compared with Emerson, thin and derivative, the shadow of a shadow; in power of description he excelled several of his contemporaries only through greater precision of details—a questionable superiority; and he possessed not a spark of Hawthorne's creative imagination. But he had this one great advantage, that his words come to us freighted with the conviction of experience. "There are nowadays professors of philosophy," he observes in defence of his Walden experiment, "but not philosophers. . . . To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independ-

ence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically."

For the student of the larger intellectual currents Thoreau offers a second advantage, which is made more conspicuous by the publication of the Journal. From his comparative poverty in original ideas and from the independence of his character we can see, better than in the case of Emerson or any other of the group, wherein the transcendentalism of Concord was an echo of the German school, and wherein it differed. No one has yet traced the exact channels by which the formulæ of romanticism migrated from Germany to New England, although it is known in a general way that the direct influence through translations in the American magazines and elsewhere was considerable. Moreover, most of the Concord scholars dabbled at one time or another in the German language. The strongest impulse, no doubt, came indirectly through Coleridge, Carlyle, and the other British Teutonisers, but once here it found a far more suitable soil than in England. Our people had just thrown off the strait-jacket of Puritan religion and were revelling in the always perilous consciousness of spiritual liberty. The situation in Germany at the time of the Romantic School was not altogether dissimilar. Lessing and the Titans of the *Sturm und Drang* had wrestled against the deadening tyranny of the Lutheran Church; they had discarded

the formalism of French literary law, and with it pretty much all sense of form whatever; they had, with the help of Kant, broken down the official philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff. On all sides resounded the watchword of *Freiheit*, liberty—except in politics, where neither then nor now have the Germans, as a people, reached any notion of individual liberty submitting to the discipline of self-imposed restraint, without need of the strong hand of Government or the bonds of socialistic regulation. So far as the aim of the Storm and Stress can be described, it might be called a rejection of the eighteenth-century principle of selection for that of universality. The whole of human nature should be embraced and developed, and this development was to come through a setting loose of every impulse and passion of the breast to run its full unhampered course. What that career meant, the *Geniesucht*, the *Unendlichkeitsstreben*, the *ringende Titanenthum*, the *Emancipation des Fleisches*, the *Seelenpriapismus*—may all be seen, by whoever cares to read it, in such a work as Wilhelm Heinse's *Ardinghello*. Out of this blind ferment of freedom came at last the spirit of a new and more compact school, the cultus of the *Ich*, the romantic *I*, as formulated by Fichte, the Schlegels, Schleiermacher, and Schelling, and as practised by Tieck, Novalis, and a small band of contemporaries.

German romanticism is often defined as a return to mediæval ideals, and for a later period in

the movement such a definition is fairly exact. And even in the beginning, although such a master of the school as Friedrich Schlegel preferred to call himself a Grecian, his interest in that land was mainly a sentimental nostalgia for some imagined home of happiness in the past; whereas his kinship, vague at first, and entirely unconscious, was rather with the mediæval Church. Through all the years after the Renaissance, the memory and habit of the Middle Ages had run beneath civilisation like one of those underground rivers, sending up its fountains here and there, even in the disciplined years of the eighteenth century. And when at last the depths had been broken up by the wild license of the Storm and Stress, it reappeared at the surface, its old name forgotten and its current charged with many deposits from its hidden pilgrimage. We are accustomed to find the relationship between romanticism and the Middle Ages chiefly in a common feeling of infinity, in their *Unendlichkeitsstreben*, and this in a way is true. But we must restrict the meaning of the word closely. In the narrower acceptation, the Middle Ages had less of the feeling than the centuries either preceding or immediately following. There is more of the infinite in Virgil's *loca nocte tacentia late* than in Dante's vision of petrified eternity; there is more of the infinite in Shakespeare than in all the mediæval poets put together, more in Plato and Spinoza than in all the intervening

schoolmen. What the Middle Ages really strove for was to combine the ideas of personality and limitlessness; the human personality was to be protracted unchanged through unending periods of time, the deity was to be at once human in nature and unbounded in power—a conception of the world which could have arisen only when the feeling for the infinite as something positive in itself and different from a mere quantitative limitlessness had been lost. Necessarily such an effort to contain the infinite within the vessel of the finite brought its penalty—to some minds an unwholesome exaltation and relaxing revery, to others, as to St. Augustine, the anguish of mortal self-contradiction. This was the burden of the *Confessions:* "How shall I call upon my God, God and my Lord? For I call him into myself when I call upon him (*quoniam utique in meipsum eum vocabo, cum invocabo eum*). And what room is there in me, where my God may enter in, where God may enter in, God who made heaven and earth?" And this combat between the thought of a limited and an unlimited personality passed through the Middle Ages, disappeared for a time, and then returned to be absorbed and modified in the writings of the romantic school.

Only so can we understand the *Ich* which Fichte erected into that tortured system of philosophy, whose chief value is that it gave a backbone of rigid articulate logic to a body of otherwise flabby sentiment. The spirit of revolt is the beginning

of the movement. Not only in art does the will or whim (*Willkür*) of the poet suffer no law over itself, as Friedrich Schlegel avers, but, more mystically, this liberty is necessary for the expansion of the I into the desired state of limitless self-satisfaction. Here is no true sense of infinity, nor yet much talk of God and the soul—these had withered away under the *Aufklärung*—but an attempt to account for the world by some juggling with the personal I and the not-I. In place of the mediæval contrast of a divine Person and a world created out of nothing by his fiat, Fichte substitutes a formula begotten of logic on lyricism. Bring together the logical law of identity (A = A, and not–A is not = A) and the craving of unrestrained egotism, and you get the romantic equivalent for mediævalism: God is replaced by the human personality, lifted as the transcendental I above the ordinary I of commerce and society, and the world is the not-I called into being as a field for its exercise and enjoyment.

Here is room for endless revery, for unbounded exaltations, for insatiable self-tormentings. This I has in practice no concern with the reason, which is the faculty of defining and delimiting; it has no kinship with the will, which means self-restraint; it is the child of the feelings, which are essentially rebellious to limitations. So in religion there was a general repudiation of Luther and the Reformation, as the source of "a dry rational emptiness which leaves the heart to pine

away." To Schleiermacher, the great preacher of the band, religion was neither reason nor morality, neither thought nor action, but an emotional contemplation of the universe by which the soul is thrown into a state of indistinguishing revery, and the I and the not-I swoon together into one. The religious feeling, he thought, should "accompany all the doings of a man as if it were a holy music; he should do all *with* religion, nothing *through* religion." And the aim of poetry was the same. It, too, should avoid all that is sharply defined, and should blend all the *genres* into a kind of ineffable music, appealing neither to the thought nor the will. "Poems which sound melodiously and are full of beautiful words, but without any sense or connection"—that, according to Novalis, is the consummation of art.

From the same source spring those peculiar accompaniments of the movement—the so-called romantic irony, the aloofness from society, the sacred idleness. Given this outreaching egotism, together with this contempt of limitations, and inevitably there arises an inner state which is the modern counterpart of St. Augustine's wrestling with the personality of God. Fichte might argue calmly about the world as not-I, but to the inflamed imagination of a Schlegel this division of nature was a disruption of self from self; it became the everlasting, uncompromising discord between the ideal and the real. The only escape

from this anguish of dissatisfaction was to ascend into those towers of indifference from which the transcendental I might survey the life of mankind, even its own activities, with unconcerned irony. In art this is the quality by which the artist "appears to smile down upon his own masterpiece from the heights of his spirit"; in life it is the feeling which leads a man to move about in society as in an alien world whose concerns are to him nothing—a mere piece of "transcendental buffoonery." Hence the contempt of business and of the Philistines follows as a kind of seal set upon the romantic soul which is conscious of itself. It cultivates a divine idleness; the summons to loaf and invite one's soul came from over the sea long before the scandalous outbreak of Walt Whitman.

And the theatre of this vagrant aloofness was nature. To the wanderer in the field and on the mountain side, with his spirit bathed in the shifting glamour of colour and form, with no troublesome call upon his reason or his will, this visible music of nature might seem now to be spun like a dream from the depths of his own being and now to be absorbed in silence back into himself. Schelling had modified this mystic revery into a vast metaphysical parallelism. "The system of nature," he said, "is at the same time the system of our spirit"; and again, "Nature is the visible spirit, the spirit is invisible nature." And Novalis, to whom thought was "only a dream of

the feelings," held that by a kind of transcendental "magic," to use his famous word, a man might juggle or shuffle spirit and nature together. In his *Lehrlinge zu Sais* romanticism received perhaps its purest expression. "At the well of freedom," says one in that book, "we sit and spy; it is the great magic-mirror wherein serene and clear the whole creation reveals itself; herein bathe the tender spirits and images of all natures, and here we behold all chambers laid open.... And when we wander from this view into nature herself, all is to us well known, and without error we recognise every form.... It is all a great scroll, to which we have the key." Whereto another prophet in the book replies in the language of Fichte, telling how a man is lord of the world, and how his I, brooding mightily over the abyss of mutable forms, reduces them slowly to the eternal order of its own law of being, *der Veste seines Ichs*.

Now, of the systematic romanticism of Fichte and Schelling there is little or nothing in the writings of our New England transcendentalists. Many of their ideas may be found in Emerson, but divested of their logical coherence; and as for Thoreau, "metaphysics was his aversion," says William Ellery Channing; "speculation on the special faculties of the mind, or whether the Not-Me comes out of the I or the All out of the infinite Nothing, he could not entertain." Nevertheless, in its more superficial aspects, almost the

whole body of romanticism may be found reflected, explicitly or implicitly, in his Journal and formal works. He, too, had sat spying in the well of freedom, and the whole art and practice of his life were a pæan of liberty: "For a man to act himself he must be perfectly free." And this was his mission, to act himself, and to point to others the path of freedom. Calvinism had been discarded in Concord as Lutheranism had been by the romanticists at Berlin. There is little concern in Thoreau with God and the soul, but in its place a sense of individualism, of sublime egotism, reaching out to embrace the world in ecstatic communion. His religion was on the surface not dissimilar to Schleiermacher's mystical contemplation of the universe; "vast films of thought floated through my brain," he says on one occasion; and the true harvest of his daily life he pronounced "a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched." This revery, or contemplation that spurned at limitations, passed easily into the romantic ideal of music—and that in a very literal, sometimes ludicrous, sense. A music-box was for him a means of consolation for the loss of his brother; a hand-organ was an instrument of the gods; and the humming wires on a cold day—his telegraph harp he called it—seemed to him to convey to his soul some secret harmony of the universe. "The wire is my redeemer, it always brings a special message to me from the Highest." This is the

thought that occurs over and over again in the Journal. More particularly in one passage dated September 3, 1851, by Channing, and jumbled together from separate entries in the Journal, he expatiates on this modern harmony of the spheres:

> As I went under the new telegraph wire, I heard it vibrating like a harp high overhead; it was as the sound of a far-off glorious life; a supernal life which came down to us and vibrated the lattice-work of this life of ours—an Æolian harp. It reminded me, I say, with a certain pathetic moderation, of what finer and deeper stirrings I was susceptible, which grandly set all argument and dispute aside, a triumphant though transient exhibition of the truth.

There is something bordering on the grotesque in this rhapsodical homage to a droning telegraph wire, but it might be paralleled by many a like enthusiasm of the German brotherhood. Nor was Thoreau unaware of this intrusion of humour into his ecstasy. Like Friedrich Schlegel, he indulges in the romantic irony of smiling down upon himself and walking through life as a *Doppelgänger:*

> I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. When the play,

it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It is a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned.

How far this irony carried him in his hatred of Philistinism and his aloofness from society, no reader of his books need be told. The life of the business man he compared to the tortures of an ascetic, and the California gold-fever threw him into a rage of disgust:—"going to California. It is only three thousand miles nearer to hell. . . . The gold of California is a touchstone which has betrayed the rottenness, the baseness, of mankind." Nor did the daily commerce of man with man come off much better. He was not one who would "feebly fabulate and paddle in the social slush." "I live," he says, "in the angle of a leaden wall, into whose alloy was poured a little bell-metal. Sometimes in the repose of my midday there reaches my ears a confused tintinnabulum from without. It is the noise of my contemporaries."—Could an image be more sublimely impertinent?

Often a passage in the Journal bears the stamp of German romanticism so plainly upon it, that we stop to trace it back in memory to Tieck or Novalis or one of the followers of the earlier Storm and Stress. Such are his scattered observations on childhood, on sleep, and the all-enveloping sacrament of silence; such is his constant thought of a new mythology which is to be the end of our study and our art—"all the phenomena of nature

need to be seen from the point of view of wonder and awe. . . . Men are probably nearer to the essential truth in their superstitions than in their science." These, I take it, are not cases of translation or plagiarism, but rather of that larger and vaguer migration of thought from one land to another. They show how thoroughly the transcendental philosophy of New England had absorbed the language and ideas of German romanticism, if not its inmost spirit.

And so, one may follow these movements step by step—through irony, aloofness, and sacred idleness, through their flowering in musical revery and communion with nature—and show how they develop on parallel lines always alike on the surface, yet always with some underlying difference more easily felt than named. And this difference is felt more strongly, is indeed then only to be understood, when we go back to that free individualism which is the root of all this varied growth. "Contemplation," says Schleiermacher in his second *Discourse*, "is and always remains something single, separate, the immediate perception, nothing more; to connect and bring together into a whole is not the business of the senses, but of abstract thought. So with religion: it is hers to abide by the immediate experience of the being and activity of the universe, by the individual perceptions and feelings; each of these is a work existing in itself without connection with others or dependence upon them. Of derivation and

association religion knows nothing; of all things that may touch her, these are the most contrary to her nature. . . . It is due just to this absolute individuality that the sphere of contemplation is so infinite." Here certainly—and we are at the very heart of German romanticism—is a doctrine which the wise men of Concord would have been the first to repudiate. "Infinity" to Schleiermacher was only another word for endless variety of particulars, amid which the soul of man, itself a momentary atom in the stream, moves in a state of perpetual wonder. The ideal of Emerson was that self-reliance by which the individual, shaking itself free from the mere conformity of manners and tradition, might rise to the community of the higher nature figured by him as the oversoul: "In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social, it is impersonal; it is God." And Thoreau represented friendship by the symbol of two lines divergent on the earth and converging together in the stars. I cannot find the equivalent of this in Schleiermacher. I find rather that, like the rest of the romantics, when he sought for the basis of a man's nature, he turned to pure emotionalism, the very power and faculty by which we are bound within the limits of our individuality. We have seen that to Schleiermacher "the essence of religion is neither thought nor action, but contemplation

and feeling." Let us see in what colours he pictures this passive surrender of the soul to the impression of the world. Thus he continues in the *Reden*:

Only do not suppose—this is indeed one of the most dangerous errors—that religious contemplation and feeling at their beginning in the first activity of the soul (*des Gemüths*) are severed in any such way as they necessarily are in our discourse. Contemplation without feeling is nothing, and possesses neither the right source nor the right power; feeling without contemplation is likewise nothing: both are something only when and because they are originally one and unseparated. That first mysterious moment, which comes to us with every sensuous perception before contemplation and feeling have drawn apart, . . . fleeting is it and transparent, like the first exhalation wherewith the dew breathes upon the awakened flowers, demure and tender like the kiss of a virgin, holy and fruitful like the embrace of marriage. Nay, not *like* this, rather it *is* all this. Quickly and magically an appearance, an event, unfolds itself to a likeness of the universe. And so, as the beloved and ever-desired form takes shape, my soul flees to her, and I embrace her not as a shadow, but as the holy essence itself. I lie in the bosom of the infinite world; I am in that moment its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own. . . . At the least jar the holy union is blown away, and then first Contemplation stands before me as a separate form; I gaze upon her, and she mirrors herself in the open soul as the image of the departing loved-one in the open eye of the youth. And now first feeling rises up from within him, and spreads like the blush of shame and desire over his cheek. This moment is the highest flowering of religion.

Could anything than this be more essentially at variance with the product of Concord? The nearest approach to it in substance is the hedonism of Pater as expressed in the *Conclusion* to his Renaissance studies. For what in the end is this religion of Schleiermacher's but that culture of the fleeting artistic impression which Pater taught: "Every moment some form grows perfect in hand and face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us—for that moment only"? It is but the modern decking out of the ancient philosophical heresy of Heracleitus that all things move and flit away, which the English writer places as the motto of his essay. I would not be unappreciative of the great German divine, but I cannot sever his unctuous preaching of emotionalism from the actual emotions which ruled among the coterie to whom his discourses were addressed. When he turns from his image of the bridal of the soul and the universe to the fable of Paradise, and declares that only through the coming of Eve was Adam enabled to lift his thoughts heavenward, when he makes of love the only source of religion, he is, of course, speaking within the acknowledged rights of the preacher. Yet I cannot forget the morbid life of Rousseau, from whom all this *Gefühlsphilosophie* is ultimately derived; I remember more particularly Heinse's yearning for some wilderness apart from the world

where he might, like a Platonic sage, pass his life in saintly studies—with Laïs at his side.[1] I am afraid of a religion which accords so easily with this blending of Plato and Laïs, and which serves so well a literature whose principle as announced by Tieck was briefly this: "The decency of our common prosaic life is unallowed in art; in these happy, pure regions it is unseemly; it is among us even the document of our commonness and immorality." I am Puritanic enough to dislike and to distrust these confusions; and it is because I do not find them in Thoreau that I can turn to him after reading much in the *romantische Schule* with a sense of relief, as one passes from a sick-chamber to the breath of the fields. Concord is remote and provincial in comparison with the Berlin and Jena of those days; it lacks the universality and culture of those centres; above all, it lacks the imposing presence of a Goethe and a Schiller, who, however loosely, were still connected with the romantic brotherhood; but it possessed one great offset—character.

"Life shall be the living breath of nature," might have been the motto of Thoreau as it was of a great German. He, too, went out to find the

[1] This conjunction of Plato and Laïs is taken up from the decadence of Greece itself. The Pseudo-Platonic epigram is well known: "I Laïs who laughed exultant over Greece, I who held that swarm of young lovers in my porches, lay my mirror before the Paphian; since such as I am I will not see myself, and such as I was I cannot."

God of history in nature, inasmuch as man is but a part of the whole, a brother to the worm—but the ways of their search led them far asunder. We have seen how on the surface the mystical revery of Novalis's *Lehrlinge zu Sais* is akin to the ideals of Thoreau: yet follow the two to the end. We shall see one of the scholars of Sais journeying through a tropical clime to the shrine of Isis; we shall see him in an ecstasy before that veiled goddess of nature; "then lifted he the light, gleaming veil, and—Rosenblüthchen sank into his arms." It is only Heinse's Plato and Laïs, or Schleiermacher's Adam and Eve if you will, under other names. There is a taint of sickliness in all this. It corresponds too well to the "heavenly weariness" of Novalis himself, as he might be found at the grave of his Sophie, vowing himself to death for lofty ensample of love's eternal faithfulness, and in a short while after discovering his religion incarnate in another woman.

Now there was no Laïs in Thoreau's life, no sentimental identification of a dead Sophie with a living Julie, and above all, no rapturous embrace of both together in the person of the goddess of nature. It may even be granted that the absence of primitive human emotion is so pronounced in his diaries as to render them thin and bloodless. To lay bare the sources of this difference between Thoreau and Novalis it would be necessary to analyse a score of influences silently at work be-

neath the surface of his culture—the inheritance of Puritan religion, denied indeed, but still making any real return to mediævalism impossible; the British notion of practical individualism expressed in the philosophy of Adam Smith; the lesson of Wordsworth's austerity in the devotion to nature; the spirit of fine expectancy derived from the poets of the seventeenth century, who were Thoreau's chief mental nourishment; the incalculable force of Emerson's personality. It comes at the last chiefly to this: the freedom of the romantic school was to the end that the whole emotional nature might develop; in Thoreau it was for the practice of a higher self-restraint. The romantics sought for the common bond of human nature in the *Gemüth*, Thoreau believed it lay in character. In the *Gemüth* (the word is untranslatable; heart, with the connotation of sentiment, mood, revery, is the nearest equivalent) Schleiermacher found the organ of religion to the absolute exclusion of the reason and the will; there Novalis looked for the inspiration of all art; communion with nature was desirable only because in her, too, might be discovered "all the variations of an endless *Gemüth*"; and to this organ of the individual person was reduced in reality the high-sounding *Ich* of Fichte. *Gemüth*—character, *Gefühl*—conduct; in that contrast lay the divergence between German and New England transcendentalism. "What are three-score years and ten hurriedly and coarsely lived to moments of divine leisure in which your

life is coincident with the life of the universe?" asks Thoreau in his Journal; but he adds as a corrective: "That aim in life is highest which requires the highest and finest discipline." Man's life, he says elsewhere, "consists not in his obedience, but his opposition, to his instincts," and genius was to him another name for health. This was his resolution and his prayer:

> I pray that the life of this spring and summer may ever lie fair in my memory. May I dare as I have never done! May I persevere as I have never done! May I purify myself anew as with fire and water, soul and body! May I gird myself to be a hunter of the beautiful, that nought escape me! May I attain to a youth never attained! I am eager to report the glory of the universe; may I be worthy to do it; to have got through with regarding human values so as not to be distracted from regarding divine values. It is reasonable that a man should be something worthier at the end of the year than he was at the beginning.

And so, despite its provincialism and its tedium, the Journal of Thoreau is a document that New England may cherish proudly. It is the mirror of a life, the record of romanticism striving to work itself out in actual character, and shows thus, as clearly as the far greater writings of Emerson, wherein the originality of the Concord school really lies. The dangers of transcendentalism are open enough—its facile optimism and unballasted enthusiasms—dangers to the intellect chiefly. Any one may point at the incompatibil-

ity of Thoreau's gospel with the requirements of society. To follow him, as to follow Walt Whitman, a man must needs shun the responsibilities of the family and State, and walk in solitary ways. Yet, withal, there is brave inspiration in the scornful independence of this botanising vagabond. For the motto of his Journal one might choose the familiar lines of Matthew Arnold:

> For most men in a brazen prison live,
> Where, in the sun's hot eye,
> With heads bent o'er their toil they languidly
> Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
> Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And the rest, a few,
> Escape their prison and depart
> On the wide ocean of life anew.
> There the freed prisoner, where'er his heart
> Listeth, will sail;
> Nor doth he know how there prevail,
> Despotic on that sea,
> Trade-winds that cross it from eternity.
> Awhile he holds some false way, undebarr'd
> By thwarting signs, and braves
> The freshening wind and blackening waves,
> And then the tempest strikes him. . . .
> And he too disappears, and comes no more.

Put out of mind the wild hurtling words Thoreau was so fond of uttering, forget the ill taste into which his narrower circumstances often led him, and there remains this tonic example of a man who did actually and violently break through

the prison walls of routine, and who yet kept a firm control of his career. If his aim was to refine his senses so that, like an Æolian harp, he might quiver in response to every impression of mountain and field and river, at least he sought for this refinement by eliminating all the coarser and more relaxing emotions of his breast; by disciplining his will into harmony with the pure and relentless laws of universal being. And if the terms of his practical philosophy may be traced back through the German romanticists to Rousseau's ideal of a return to nature, yet his sympathetic knowledge of hard savage life among the Indians and the tradition of New England's struggle with the wilderness kept him, always in act and generally in words, from sentimental softening of the reality.

Perhaps, in the end, what remains in the mind of the reader is the sense of constant expectancy that plays on almost every page of his works. "Is not the attitude of expectation somewhat divine?" he asks in one of his letters, and always it is morning with him. The clearest expression of this buoyancy of the dawn may be found in the account of *A Walk to Wachusett*, but it is never long absent from the Journal and was a characteristic of his daily life. He walked the fields like one who was on the alert for some divine apparition, and Mr. M. D. Conway has observed that a strange light seemed to shine on his countenance when abroad. This,

too, is a trait of the romantic spirit, no doubt; but its quality in Thoreau does not point to Germany. It came to him in part from his birth in a new land, and it was strengthened by his familiarity with the English poets of the seventeenth century. In the works of Henry Vaughan more particularly you will find this note of expectation, rising at times to a cry of ecstasy for which there is no equivalent in the later American. I think of Vaughan as travelling his quiet rounds in his Silurian hills, with an eye open to every impression, and a heart like Thoreau's always filled with the waiting wonder of the dawn. If his mood strikes deeper than Thoreau's, it is because, coming before the romantic worship of the individual, he never cut himself off from the Church and State, but moved in the greater currents of tradition.

THE CENTENARY OF LONGFELLOW

THE position of Longfellow is somewhat curious. He was, and I suppose still is, the most beloved poet of the past century, and this not only among the ignorant and half-educated, but among people of the finest culture. Men as different in temperament as Kipling and J. H. Shorthouse give credit to his wonderful knowledge of the sea, and to Shorthouse, at least, he was always "very dear." He was also one of the favourite poets of so cunning a magician in words as Lafcadio Hearn; and to such names one might add indefinitely. Yet it remains true that Longfellow has never been quite accepted by the professed critics, that they have spoken of him commonly with reservation, sometimes even with contempt. Not many, indeed, have adopted just the insolent tone of Mr. Francis Gribble, to whom Longfellow was merely a "prig," with no characteristic habit except that of "decorating his person," a "poet of the obvious and the hum-drum," a man "equally devoid of humour and of passion," whose "intellectual outfit consists of a 'store suit' from a theological emporium." We have a right to be incensed at the tone of such writing, but, waiving this, we must still acknowledge that there has been a distinct undercurrent of protest

against the poet's easy popularity. Not his the felicity he attributed to a greater name, thinking, no doubt, of the cavilling he himself endured even during his life: "O happy poet, by no critic vext!"

And this contrast between the love of so many readers for Longfellow and the hesitation of his critics is perfectly comprehensible. The critics are mainly right. Let us not blunt or pervert our taste by ignoring distinctions. In the first place, no one who has stored his mind with the work of the great poets can read Longfellow without stumbling continually over reminiscences that do not fall exactly under the head of plagiarism, but that have the effect of reducing what has been nobly and individually written to a kind of smooth commonplace. I might from my own recollection fill pages with these dulled echoes of a finer music. Let me illustrate by a few examples. Longfellow, we are told by his biographer, wrote but a single love poem (and I, for one, am ready to honour him for this reserve), that sonnet to "My morning and my evening star of love! My best and gentlest lady!" 'T is a pretty, and, among poets, rare compliment to his wife; but somehow the taste of it grows flat, and that *best and gentlest lady* drops to something resembling the merely respectable, when we recall the most perfect of Greek epigrams, Plato's *Ἀστὴρ πρὶν μὲν ἔλαμπες*, which came to Longfellow, no doubt, through Shelley's version:

Thou wert the morning star among the living,
Ere thy fair light had fled ;—
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving
New splendour to the dead.

It is not, observe, that our Longfellow has taken the precise thought of the original ; there is here no charge of stealing. It is rather that his image suggests the same image used differently and more poetically by another. In the same way his complaint beginning, "Half of my life is gone, and I have let The years slip from me," inevitably forces a comparison with Milton's more resonant note : "When I consider how my light is spent Ere half my days."

Again Longfellow writes :

God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again—

and we remember Keats :

Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have ye souls in heaven, too,
Double-lived in regions new?

Longfellow writes of the unseen dwellers in *Haunted Houses :*

We meet them at the doorway, on the stair,
Along the passages they come and go,
Impalpable impressions on the air,
A sense of something moving to and fro—

and the memory goes back to Thomas Hood's lines in the most ghostly of English poems:

Those dreary stairs, where with the sounding stress
Of ev'ry step so many echoes blended,
The mind, with dark misgivings, fear'd to guess
How many feet ascended.

. . . . . .

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

But it would be tedious to multiply examples. The point, as I have said, is not that Longfellow was a plagiarist or lacked originality—greater poets than he have taken their own where they found it with a more royally predatory hand—but that these rather vague resemblances of language and metaphor so often draw our attention to the lower plane upon which his imagination moves. And here I would beg for a little indulgence. This distinction between the higher and lower planes of the imagination goes so near to the very roots of taste and criticism, it is a matter so elusive withal, that I would run the risk of an insistence which may seem like the proverbial breaking of a butterfly upon a wheel. The question turns upon that dualism, or duplicity, in human nature, often misunderstood and to-day more often ignored, the perception of which does yet in some way mark the degree of a poet's or a philosopher's initiation into the mysteries of experi-

ence. To make the point clearer, let me compare two poems which are known by heart to all, and whose effect can be tested by the impressions of memory. One is Longfellow's *Weariness*, of which I will quote the first and last stanzas:

O little feet! that such long years
Must wander on through hopes and fears,
Must ache and bleed beneath your load;
I, nearer to the wayside inn
Where toil shall cease and rest begin,
Am weary, thinking of your road!

. . . . . .

O little souls! as pure and white
And crystalline as rays of light
Direct from heaven, their source divine;
Refracted through the mist of years,
How red my setting sun appears,
How lurid looks this soul of mine!

The other is Heine's even more familiar lyric on a somewhat similar theme: *Du bist wie eine Blume*, which in my translation will at least be less trite, however much of its charm may have evaporated:

So fair and fresh and pure
Even as a flower thou art;
I look on thee, and sadness
Glideth into my heart.

'T is as tho' my hands were resting
Upon thy head in prayer,
Asking that God might keep thee
So pure and fresh and fair.

Now, both of these poems have the power of touching the heart, and both have attained the noble distinction of living in the mouths of men ; yet it would be uncritical to say that the impression from them is quite the same, or that their reputation is quite equal. I would not seem to be insensible to the tenderness of Longfellow's lines, but something, one feels, is still lacking to give them that penetrating, clinging appeal which belongs to Heine's even simpler song. And I think that, if we look into this difference, it will appear to depend most of all upon the greater and lesser depth of that sense of dualism which the two poets have felt and put into language. There is in Longfellow's poem the contrast of innocent childhood and old age wearied of the world ; but this contrast springs from the cumulative effect, so to speak, of time, the refracting mist of years, and beyond this the idea scarcely goes. The emotion conveyed is barely, if at all, distinguished from the sentimental pathos of daily, commonplace life. Whereas in Heine something different and, it must be said, higher, enters. It is not easy, as it never is in the case of true poetry, to define precisely where this added touch comes in—whether in the imagery of the prayer, the lingering cadence of the repeated epithets, or in some haunting vagueness of romantic irony—but one instinctively thinks more of the symbolical power of the poem than of any personal incident or emotion ; and this contrast between

the loveliness of youth and the satiety of age becomes a sign of a conflict inherent in the poet's own heart, nay, if you will, of the enigmatical dualism, the pathetic or terrible sense of transiency, that runs through the heart of the world.

Well, let us accept this lower position for the greater part—but not for all, as I shall attempt to show—of Longfellow's poetry. Let us admit that his peculiar popularity is due to the fact that he does not require of us any violent readjustment of our ordinary moods, that he sets our own daily thoughts and emotions to music. Is he not to be prized, and praised, for this? Like Whittier, he is the poet of the hearth and the home; yet with a difference. It is in accordance with the well-known tricks of poetic inspiration that the Quaker poet, who was never married and in his earlier years of manhood had no settled abode, should have written lovingly of the peace and protection of the home; whereas Longfellow, who knew all the intimate joys of the family, should have dwelt more on the forebodings and memories of loss. We think of Whittier's *Snow-Bound*, with its snug comforts of the hearth in a New England winter, or of his *Pennsylvania Pilgrim*, that blandest of pastoral poems; even his fancies of the future life took on this ideal of the home, as I have pointed out in another essay. But these are not the notes of Longfellow. He, rather, in a hundred various keys sings of the

parting of friends; of resignation for the "one vacant chair"—

> The air is full of farewells to the dying,
> And mournings for the dead;

of the cry of David in the Chamber over the Gate for Absalom his son. Even in his child poems there often lurks a shadow of anxiety:

> I said unto myself, if I were dead,
> What would befall these children? what would be
> Their fate, who now are looking up to me
> For help and furtherance? Their lives, I said,
> Would be a volume wherein I have read
> But the first chapters, and no longer see
> To read the rest of their dear history,
> So full of beauty and so full of dread.

It is the treatment of these, and other such themes as these, that has made him the one poet whom you will find in almost every household, the poet who is really read and enjoyed by the people; for it is just this sentiment of facile pathos that marks the true popularity. And here, also, we discover his relation to the Teutonising and romanticising—if the word may be passed—of New England culture. From sources of German metaphysics, whether directly or indirectly, from Fichte and Schelling and Schleiermacher, Emerson brought in his transcendental philosophy; from the same romantic school came the impulse that strengthened Hawthorne in his love of the weird and the subterranean, as also his aggravated sense of solitude in the world; there Thoreau got

his mystic nature cult—always, it need not be added, with differences caused by other surroundings and traditions. Longfellow brought from Germany the ideal of a world literature which should absorb the best of all lands; but more than that, he imported into Cambridge the sentimental note that runs through German letters. He gave to our poetry the romantic *Empfindsamkeit*, refined and qualified indeed by the purity and sweetness and strength of his own nature.

For there is about his muse, I know not what, a certain gracious sweetness, which has the power, as was said when he received his degree at Cambridge, England, "to solace the ills of life and draw men from its low cares *ad excelsiora*"—an allusion which was caught and applauded by the captious undergraduates. One might analyse the elements of this charm in part, if it were profitable. He had in the first place the rare gift of rhythm; his lines sing themselves inevitably, and there is never, except in some of his hexameters and his blank verse, any doubt about the cadence, or any feeling that the cadence does not fit the thought. Lowell was thinking of this easy rhythmical quality when he wrote of Longfellow on his sixtieth birthday:

> I need not praise the sweetness of his song,
> Where limpid verse to limpid verse succeeds
> Smooth as our Charles, when, fearing lest he wrong
> The new moon's mirrored skiff, he glides along,
> Full without noise, and whispers in his reeds.

And then Longfellow has the second, and still rarer, gift of interest, the power of catching the reader's attention with the first word and holding it to the end. Personally I am not particularly fond of *Evangeline* and the other longer poems, with the exception of some of the *Tales of a Wayside Inn* and *The Golden Legend;* I think his virtue lies elsewhere. But all, or nearly all of them have at least the trick of arousing interest. So the fancy is stirred by those first words of *Evangeline*, "This is the forest primeval," and kept awake by the shifting scenes of nature and the sentimental appeal until the very close:

> While from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean
> Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

(Hexameters, by the way, as sonorous and rhythmical as any in the language.) Not all the great poets have this gift of interest; it is not conspicuous in Milton or Virgil or Wordsworth; it even goes at times with very inferior qualities: but always it is an immense aid in enforcing whatever other powers a writer may possess. It would not be easy to say in just what this faculty of interest resides. In Longfellow it, perhaps, depends mainly on his power of making the reader feel at once that here are his own ideas, almost his own language. Nor are the artifices of rhetoric wanting. Especially, like Lowell, our poet had a

wonderful gift of metaphor. You would be surprised if you went through Longfellow and marked the copiousness, the variety, and the ingenuity of these figures. Even from memory one might bring together a long list of metaphors and similes transforming a single group of appearances, such, for example, as the phenomena of night. One might begin with the first words of the poem that follows the prelude of his first volume of collected verse :

> I heard the trailing garments of the Night
> Sweep through her marble halls.

How miraculously that too familiar image expresses the gradual hushing of the earth as twilight descends ! Or, to pass from sound to vision, there is the even better known stanza :

> . . . and the darkness
> Falls from the wings of Night,
> As a feather is wafted downward
> From an eagle in his flight.

Less subtle and less familiar are a dozen other metaphors of the night that might be quoted, such as the lines in *Hiawatha :*

> Where into the empty spaces
> Sinks the sun, as the flamingo
> Drops into her nest at nightfall
> In the melancholy marshes ;—

or this more trivial comparison :

In broad daylight, and at noon,
Yesterday I saw the moon
Sailing high, but faint and white,
As a schoolboy's paper kite ;—

or this more aerial fancy :

As a pale phantom with a lamp
Ascends some ruin's haunted stair,
So glides the moon along the damp
Mysterious chambers of the air.

These are but a few of the metaphors I might from my own memory bring together on a single theme. Most wonderful of all, perhaps, is that comparison whose beauty has grown dim to us through too much repetition :

And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

(And here again his art is helped by his delicate rhythmical sense. As an example of the force of little things, let the stanza be read without the word "as" in the last line, and see how flat it seems in comparison.)

Now metaphors, I know, are a dangerous rhetorical weapon, and as a rule they are used with extreme parsimony by the greatest poets ; you will find a score of them in Longfellow to one in Milton. Their tendency is to substitute the diversion of fancy for the more tenacious vision of the imagination ; they distract the mind ordina-

rily from its intense preoccupation and so lessen, while diversifying, our intellectual emotion. But they are peculiarly appropriate to such a talent as Longfellow's, as they are to Lowell's, and to them is largely due the continuance and ease of the reader's interest. And apparently they flowed into Longfellew's mind quite unbidden. There is in his published verse nothing better in its way than this simile jotted down in his diary January 29th, 1849 :

> Another of Emerson's wonderful lectures. The subject *Inspiration;* the lecture itself an illustration of the theme. Emerson is like a beautiful portico, in a lovely scene of nature. We stand expectant, waiting for the High Priest to come forth ; and lo, there comes a gentle wind from the portal, swelling and subsiding ; and the blossoms and the vine leaves shake, and far away down the green fields the grasses bend and wave ; and we ask, "When will the High Priest come forth and reveal to us the truth?" and the disciples say, "He has already gone forth, and is yonder in the meadows." "And the truth he was to reveal?" "It is Nature ; nothing more."

These are the qualities of thought and manner that have at once made Longfellow the most beloved of poets and kept him from full acceptance among the critical. But there is still another aspect of his work, which is sometimes overlooked. The weakness in his genius, as in that of the New England school generally to which he belonged, was an absence of resistance. There is a significant entry in his diary, under the date March 22, 1848 : "He [Lowell] says he means

never to write any more poetry—at least for many years; he 'cannot write slowly enough.'" One feels this lack of the inward check in much of Longfellow; the lines flow from him too smoothly and fluently; they have not been held back long enough to be steeped in the deeper and more obstinate emotions of the breast—

> Fi, du rhythme commode,
> Comme un soulier trop grand.

When the proper resistance came to him, it was commonly the result of some check imposed by the difficulties of form, rather than of his own artistic inhibition. Thus of all his poems, the dramas in blank verse are about the flattest, and in general his power increases with the intricacy of the rhymes employed. The rule is, of course, not without exceptions. To some readers the easy flow of the trochees in *Hiawatha* has the charm of a singing brook that bubbles over its pebbles all a summer's day. And occasionally in those free quatrains, whose secret he learned from Heine, and which seem so easy, but are really so difficult, he strikes a note that is rare enough in English. So, one sleepless night, he makes this entry in his diary: "Nahant, September 8, 1880, four o'clock in the morning," and then turns the memorandum into verse:

> Four by the clock! and yet not day;
> But the great world rolls and wheels away,
> With its cities on land and ships at sea,
> Into the dawn that is to be!

> Only the lamp in the anchored bark
> Sends its glimmer across the dark,
> And the heavy breathing of the sea
> Is the only sound that comes to me.

When reading these lines, it is easy to understand why Kipling reckoned Longfellow among the few poets who really knew the sea. No one who has spent much of his time on some quiet harbour of our Atlantic coast can fail to be struck by the magic evocation of that second stanza—the night-bound shore, the single light low on the water, the sleepy wash of the waves. Or, take this stanza from the poem of meditations before the flames of a driftwood fire :

> And, as their splendour flashed and failed,
> We thought of wrecks upon the main,
> *Of ships dismasted, that were hailed*
> *And sent no answer back again.*

Has ever any poet, in a few quiet words, expressed more perfectly the awe and mystery of the sea, the sense of that vastness where so much may happen unseen and unknown of the world ?

Such triumphs Longfellow wins now and then in the least resistant metres, but his greater work, that on which his artistic fame will depend, is in the more elaborate forms, particularly in the sonnet. Professor C. E. Norton, who speaks of Longfellow with the authority of a friend and a critic, has just published a sketch of Longfellow's life, with a selection of his autobiographic poems. It

is an excellent book for the occasion, but one could wish that he had, instead, brought together all the sonnets, with a study of Longfellow as an artist.[1] For ripeness of style and imagery such a volume would stand easily at the head of American poetry, and it would show an aspect of Longfellow's genius which is obscured by the bulk of his more popular work. It would place him as a peer among the great sonnet writers of England. We should have but a slender volume—there are altogether only sixty-three of the original sonnets—but of what richness and variety of scope! Here in brief compass are all the interests of his life. His long acquaintance with books speaks in those six magnificent sonnets prefixed to the translation of *The Divine Comedy*, and in the separate sonnets on Dante, and Milton, and Keats. Was ever poet more happily celebrated than Chaucer in these lines?

An old man in a lodge within a park;
The chamber walls depicted all around
With portraitures of huntsman, hawk, and hound,
And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
Then writeth in a book like any clerk.

[1] Since this was written the sonnets have been edited by Ferris Greenslet and issued separately. Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1907.

He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song ; and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise odours of ploughed field or flowery mead.

And then by the side of this set the contrasted picture of Shakespeare's stage :

A vision as of crowded city streets,
With human life in endless overflow ;
Thunder of thoroughfares ; trumpets that blow
To battle ; clamour, in obscure retreats,
Of sailors landed from their anchored fleets ;
Tolling of bells in turrets, and below
Voices of children, and bright flowers that throw
O'er garden walls their intermingled sweets !

To write like this is to combine at once the function of the critic and the poet. Wordsworth may have surpassed him, but no other, I think, in this use of the sonnet.

But the literary flavour in this little book of ours would be no stronger than the other interests we associate with him. Here in the sonnets to Agassiz and Felton and Sumner, the friendships that made so large a part of his life would find expression ; his tender solicitude for children speaks in *A Shadow* and *To-Morrow ;* his love of nature and the sea finds here its full utterance; his reserved, yet earnest, part in the Abolition movement and the war gives pathetic dignity to *A Nameless Grave*, which Mr. Howells has signal-

ised for its perfect grace and ease; his reminiscences of travel, which did so much to overcome American provincialism, give colour to *Venice*, *The River Rhone*, and half a dozen others; the sad fortitude of his old age, as all old age is sad, breathes in this last sonnet he was to write, his farewell inscribed to *My Books:*

Sadly, as some old mediæval knight
Gazed at the arms he could no longer wield,
The sword two-handed and the shining shield
Suspended in the hall, and full in sight,
While secret longings for the lost delight
Of tourney or adventure in the field
Came over him, and tears but half-concealed
Trembled and fell upon his beard of white,
So I behold these books upon their shelf,
My ornaments and arms of other days;
Not wholly useless, though no longer used,
For they remind me of my former self,
Younger and stronger, and the pleasant ways
In which I walked, now clouded and confused.

These are but glimpses of the riches in little room that a book of Longfellow's sonnets would offer. They would set forth to unbelievers an artist of rare tact and power, and they would be the best commemoration of the sweetest character that ever revealed itself in rhymes. I know that some have professed to find a certain solemn self-complacency in Longfellow. They turn to the selections from his diary in the Life published by his brother, and point with a kind of patronising smile at such an entry as this:

December 6. [1838. He was then in his thirty-second year.] A beautiful holy morning within me. I was softly excited, I knew not why; and wrote with peace in my heart and not without tears in my eyes, *The Reaper and the Flowers, a Psalm of Death.*

This man takes himself too seriously, they say; he has no humour. And what then? Why, most of the great poets of the world were without humour, and have they been any the less accepted for that? Humour is well in its place, but there is no reason why we should make a fetich of it, as most of us do in these days. And as for taking his moods and inspiration overseriously, there is nothing in Longfellow's diary that in any way approaches the stupendous solemnity of Wordsworth's introductory notes to his own poems. But the best refutation of such churlish criticism is in the poems of Longfellow, especially those in the sonnet form, which from the time of Petrarch, and of Shakespeare in English, has been the chosen vehicle for poetic confession.

Turn again to that desired book of sonnets if you wish to see the mellow sweetness and the strength of Longfellow's character. I have already referred to his single love-poem, the sonnet to "My morning and my evening star," which, like most of such effusions to a man's wife, rings rather flat; but not so that other sonnet of commemoration. The story of the second Mrs. Longfellow's terrible death by fire and of her husband's

efforts to save her is too well known to bear repeating, as may seem also the lines which he wrote eighteen years afterwards, and which were found in his portfolio, unpublished, after his own death:

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face—the face of one long dead—
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.
There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

I think we need have no fear of the slurs of shallowness and foppery cast upon a man who carried his suffering so deep in his heart that the world was unaware of its existence. And it is pleasant to hear that the woman so honoured was worthy to be a poet's wife. She is described as having "great beauty, and a presence of dignity and distinction, the true image of a beautiful nature." Everybody knows the home over which she presided, the Craigie House, in Cambridge, that looks out from Brattle Street over what is now a park, named after the poet, to the river Charles,

celebrated by him in so many songs. It had been Washington's headquarters when he was in command of the army about Boston, and Longfellow felt the ghostly presence of his great predecessor :

> Once, ah, once, within these walls,
> One whom memory oft recalls,
> The Father of his Country, dwelt,
> And yonder meadows broad and damp
> The fires of the besieging camp
> Encircled with a burning belt.
> Up and down these echoing stairs,
> Sounded his majestic tread ;
> Yes, within this very room
> Sat he in those hours of gloom,
> Weary both in heart and head.

But there were other memories attached to the old mansion, which Longfellow did not put into verse. The lady who owned the house and with whom Longfellow lodged before it came into his own possession, was a personage that caused a good deal of wonder and some consternation among the pious folk of Cambridge. There are probably people still living who can recall her figure as she sat at the window reading—reading that arch-mocker, Voltaire, in the original French, it was believed. One of the legends about her is to the effect that she sturdily refused to allow the caterpillars on her elm-trees to be burned. "Leave them alone!" she would cry; "what are we ourselves but miserable worms!"—

which would seem to be as much scriptural as Voltairian.

Here Longfellow lived a large and bountiful life, befitting one to whom fame and honour and prosperity came hand in hand, neither reluctantly nor singly. It is mainly in recognition of his character as a man and poet that his centenary has been turned all over the country into a kind of *agape;* but it is partly also because, even better than Lowell, he represents a beautiful society now passed away and almost forgotten. I was interested the other day in looking through a pamphlet just published, which contains the proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society—an association of gentlemen and ladies formed a couple of years ago to gather and preserve local traditions. The papers are filled with memories of the little college town to which Longfellow came as a young teacher, steeped in the literatures of Europe. It would be pleasant to quote at length from the recollections of Colonel Higginson and Professor Norton; they give almost a better picture of the quaint life of the day than Lowell's essay on *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago.* Says Professor Norton in his opening address:

> So great are the changes in the town since my childhood that the aspects and conditions of those days seem more than a lifetime away. I have the happiness of passing my old age in the house in which I was born. It has always been my home; but when I was a boy, it was in the country—now it is suburban and in the heart

of a city. Kirkland Street was a country road with not a single house on its southern side, but with a wide stretch quite over to Harvard Street of marsh land and huckleberry pasture, with channels running through the thick growth of shrubs, often frozen in the winter, and on which we boys used to skate over the very site of the building in which we have met to-night. Down as far as to Inman Square, the region was solitary, while beyond Inman Square, toward Boston, was an extensive wood of pines with a dense underbrush, the haunt, as we boys used to believe, of gamblers and other bad characters from the neighbouring city, and to be swiftly hurried by if nightfall caught us near it. The whole region round my father's house was, indeed, so thinly settled that it preserved its original rural character. It was rich in wild growth, and well known to botanists as the habitat of many rare wild flowers; the marshes were fragrant in spring with azalea and the clethra; and through spring, summer, and autumn there was a profuse procession of the familiar flowers of New England. It was a favourite resort of birds, but there is now little left of it fit for their homes, though many of them still revisit in their migrations the noisy locality where their predecessors enjoyed a peaceful and retired abode.

But even a greater change than that from country village to suburban town has taken place here in Old Cambridge in the last seventy years. The people have changed. In my boyhood the population was practically all of New England origin, and in large proportion Cambridge-born, and inheritors of Old Cambridge traditions. The fruitful invasion of barbarians had not begun. The foreign-born people could be counted upon the fingers. There was Rule, the excellent Scotch gardener, who was not without points of resemblance to Andrew Fairservice; there was Sweetman, the one Irish day labourer, faithful and intelligent, trained as a boy in one of the "hedge-

schools" of his native Ireland, and ready to lean on his spade and put the troublesome schoolboy to a test on the Odes of Horace, or even on the *Arma virumque cano;* and at the heart of the village was the hair-cutter, Marcus Reamie, from some unknown foreign land, with his shop full, in a boy's eyes, of treasures, some of his own collecting, some of them brought from distant romantic parts of the world by his sailor son. There were doubtless other foreigners, but I do not recall them, except a few teachers of languages in the College, of whom three filled in these and later years an important place in the life of the town—Dr. Beck, Dr. Follen, and Mr. Sales. But the intermixture of foreign elements was so small as not to affect the character of the town; in fact, everybody knew not only everybody else in person, but also much of everybody's tradition, connections, and mode of life. It has been a pathetic experience for me to live all my life in one community and to find myself gradually becoming a stranger to it.

And what society was gathered together in this village among the fields and fens! Read the poems written by Longfellow on the death of his friends—on Hawthorne, Dana, Sumner, Agassiz, Felton, and I know not how many others. Or, which of our cities to-day can show any gathering of men equal to the weekly meetings of Longfellow and Lowell and Professor Norton to discuss the translation of Dante? We may, if we choose, look back upon that life as in many ways provincial; but how much of the strain and inconsequence of our would-be cosmopolitan society it lacked. One need not be a New Englander, or a Harvard man, to join heartily in honouring

the poet who represents the highest and most homogeneous culture this country has yet produced.

And it is wholesome for us to read and praise Longfellow. It is not necessary to place his work as a whole beside that of the greatest poet, or to overlook his shortcomings; but I think even those shortcomings have their special value at the present hour. We are apt to take our poets rather solemnly, when we read them at all, to search for deep and complex meanings; and in the process we often lose the inward serenity and unvexed faith which it is the mission of the poet to bestow. Not the stress of our emotion or our intellectual perturbation is the measure of our understanding, but rather the depth of our response to that word of the exiled Dante, when, in the convent court, he was questioned as to what he sought—*La pace*, peace. And Longfellow knew the meaning of that word as Dante used it. In the sorrow that fell upon him after his tragic bereavement, he found solace, or at least strength, in the daily translation of *The Divine Comedy*. Every lover of poetry knows the first and finest of the sonnets he prefixed to that work:

Oft have I seen at some cathedral door
A labourer, pausing in the dust and heat,
Lay down his burden, and with reverent feet
Enter, and cross himself, and on the floor
Kneel to repeat his paternoster o'er;
Far off the noises of the world retreat:

The loud vociferations of the street
  Become an undistinguishable roar.
So, as I enter here from day to day,
  And leave my burden at this minster gate,
Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
  The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
  While the eternal ages watch and wait.

We need have no fear of paying homage to a poet who wrote such lines as those. And he himself, if he did not, like Dante and his peers, build at the great cathedral of song, did at least add to it a fair and homely chapel, where also, to one who comes humbly and reverently, the eternal ages watch and wait.

DONALD G. MITCHELL

THERE was a time not so long ago when the *Reveries of a Bachelor*, and perhaps *Dream-Life*, stood on the shelf of every college sophomore, the gift of some gentle friend. 'T was a pretty custom, as if the donor with furtive fingers were knocking for admission into these mysterious masculine quarters, and would hint with sly bashfulness that a young bachelor's idle thoughts should properly turn to matrimony. Well, the sophomore and his maid, I am told, have grown a little ashamed of this peculiar form of sentimentality; yet the writer of the *Reveries* may take confidence in denying, as he did in a recent Preface to his book, "that the boisterous and scathing and rollicking humour of our time has blown all of pathos and all of the more delicate human sympathies into limbo." I do not know certainly what author now acts as go-between for the tender approximations of youth—Dr. Henry van Dyke, I dare say, or some other licensed caterer *virginibus puerisque;* the fashion of taste changes, and old favourites pass away, but there remains the audience, "for ever panting and for ever young."

The real danger is that the name of "Ik Mar-

vel," the dreamer, should quite eclipse the more substantial author, who, as he says rather plaintively, has "written very much better books, every way, since that time," though the world of book-buyers will not hear it. Perhaps the handsome new edition of his works[1] will bring that fickle world to its senses. I hope so, for Mr. Mitchell represents that rare figure in American letters, the gentleman amateur, whom it is good to honour. Yet it must be confessed that a full half of his volumes are but tenuous things to stand against the trade-winds of oblivion. One cannot feel easy, for instance, about those six volumes of light talk on English and American literature. One might recommend them as pleasant schooling for the young, were it not that Mr. Mitchell shows the amateur's dread of stating a simple fact. They presuppose too much knowledge for the beginner, and they are not solid enough critically for the mature. Nor can one be quite sure of his fiction. I profess myself able to read *Dr. Johns*, at least the greater part of it, with a kind of pious delight, but I am doubtful of its power over those who have not been baptised in the clear, cool springs of New England tradition. Too many readers, I fear, will feel like the sinner of the story, who wrote to the saintly minister from his wanderings:

[1] *The Works of Donald G. Mitchell.* Edgewood Edition, in fifteen volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.

> I shall never forget the cheery joyousness of that little family scene at your fireside, the winning modesty and womanliness of your lost Rachel, and the serenity and peace that lay about your household. It was to me, fresh from the vices of Europe, like some charming Christian idyl, in whose atmosphere I felt myself not only an alien, but a profane intruder.

The first half of the book is indeed a charming Christian idyl, belonging to that little backwater from the world's current where frail plants open and send out their aroma and fade away in the still shade. It requires more intellectual abstinence than most of us possess to relish fully the savour of this old idealised New England. The passions of life have no place in this sheltered retreat, and when in the course of events these break upon the scene the tale loses its amulet of reticence and becomes only futile.

It is by his more personal works Mr. Mitchell will be remembered for a while, by his chapters of European travel and his pictures of country life at Edgewood. He himself has told us how, when a young man, he was called from working an old Connecticut farm to travel abroad. That was in the forties, when Longfellow's *Hyperion* had set a new model for sentimental reminiscences, and it was inevitable that the traveller on his return should shake out his note-books, kept religiously in shorthand, and give the world a volume of *Gleanings*. And the book is well worth reading to-day. France and Austria and Holland were still a land of discovery; it was still possible

to wonder at the gay wicked life of the Parisians, who had no knowledge of "our glorious Saxon home-spirit"; the roads of Illyria led even further into the kingdom of romance than they do now; and the Dutchman was always artistically placid and steeped in tobacco. Your traveller was not ashamed to muse over a bunch of flowers given him by a pretty waiting-maid, as he was bold enough to confess that he had often "drained a good tankard of home-brewed, and felt myself—not a whit the worse for it" (only a dash could prepare the reader for the enormity of such a confession). Well, innocence for innocence, sentiment for sentiment, I prefer the sunny Latin and Italian romance colouring Mr. Mitchell's memoirs to the nebulous fog of Teutonism that drifts through the pages of *Hyperion*. That is my foible, if you will, but the companion who can beguile me through Europe with scraps of the classical poets we learned at school, has made me his humble servant for ever after. "The clouds thickened gradually into darkness," says Mr. Mitchell at the beginning of his book, "for the sun was down;—*ponto nox incubat atra*—black night brooded on the waters; the very half line came to me, as I sat hugging the low bulwarks, and gasping between the gusts." With so Virgilian a comrade I protest I can cross even the Channel without bickering. And how shall I quarrel with a friend who quotes Tacitus and Juvenal to me at Lyons; or at Vaucluse reminds

me of "some heart-killing Laura in his Homeland" in the language of Petrarch—*nelle medesime dolenti parole;* or excuses his surrender of alms to a bewitching little beggar maid with the old tag, *Semper causa est, cur ego semper amem?* We have lost this trick of easy, high-bred quotation, and the world is a shabbier place thereby. To go about with Virgil and Horace in one's mind is to travel as a gentleman, and justifies a little contempt for the contemporaneity of the intellectual upstart.

At the age of thirty-three, having travelled extensively, and seen something of consular service, having, in orthodox fashion, jilted the law for literature, Mr. Mitchell bought an estate outside of New Haven and settled down for the rest of his life as a gentleman farmer and landscape gardener. The result of this experience we have in three slender volumes, *Wet Days at Edgewood*, *My Farm at Edgewood*, and *Out-of-Town Places*—by all odds his most successful literary work, because here the strain of amateurishness is the very pith and marrow of the theme. And the best of these is the first. One may cavil at his language sometimes, at his "ruralities" and "ruralisms"—horrid words; one may wish that he showed more respect for our ignorance, and dealt more liberally with elementary facts, but, after all, what a delight it is to have so genial an exponent of the long line of farm and garden writers from Hesiod down to the authority of yesterday:

In that corner of my library which immediately flanks the east window is bestowed a motley array of farm-books; there are fat ones in yellow vellum; there are ponderous folios and stately dedications to some great man we never heard of; there are thin tractates in ambitious type, which promised, fifty years and more ago [a hundred and more, now] to overset all the established methods of farming; there is Jethro Tull, in his irate way, thrashing all down his columns the effete Virgilian husbandry; there is the sententious talk of Cato, the latinity of Columella, and some little musty duodecimo, hunted down upon the quays of Paris, with such title as *Comes Rusticus;* there is the first thin quarto of Judge Buel's *Cultivator*—since expanded into the well-ordered stateliness of the *Country Gentleman;* there are black-letter volumes of Barnaby Googe, and books compiled by the distinguished "Captain Garvase Markhame"; and there is Xenophon flanked by a Hesiod, and the heavy Greek squadron of the *Geoponics.* I delight immensely in taking an occasional wet-day talk with these old worthies.

What names and what memories? How Barnaby Googe and Jethro Tull smack of the fat English soil; how deep a furrow of the mind has been left by the effete Virgilian husbandry! And there are other names that take their proper place in the papers that follow—Horace and all the poets who have retired from the city to their *modus agri non ita magnus*, even Boileau, who, according to his gardener, had no eyes for growing trees though he would have been keen enough for the crop if St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom had been planted; Italians of the Renaissance who

joined the arts of ploughing and of living ; philosophers and exiled princes, and all who have gained the world by losing it. "To be a husbandman," says Cowley, for whom Mr. Mitchell might have found a niche in his long gallery of honour —"to be a husbandman is but a retreat from the city ; to be a philosopher, from the world, or, rather, a retreat from the world as it is man's into the world as it is God's. But, since nature denies to most men the capacity or appetite, and fortune allows but to a very few the opportunities or possibility of applying themselves wholly to philosophy, the best mixture of human affairs that we can make are the employments of a country life. It is, as Columella calls it, *Res sine dubitatione proxima et quasi consanguinea sapientiæ*—the nearest neighbour, or rather next in kindred, to philosophy."

It is not Mr. Mitchell's literary cunning we admire so much, although he has shown considerable art in weaving together his own farm experiences with these studies of his forebears, and has weighted the whole with allusions to the civil war that, while he wrote, was calling our young men from the plough as it had taken them in the days of Virgil :

> Ne pueri, ne tanta animis assuescite bella,
> Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.

Yet it is not his art we admire so much as the life he describes, with its rare union of the scholar

and the farmer, of the love for books and for the soil. Every page of his writings shows that the author has a wide and genial acquaintance with literature, but it is equally plain that he is at home with the implements of the field. "There is no manner of work done upon a New England farm," he says, with pardonable pride, "to which some day I have not put my hand—whether it be chopping wood, laying wall, sodding a coal-pit, cradling oats, weeding corn, shearing sheep, or sowing turnips." And elsewhere, summing up the profit of his labours, he adds: "Nature has solemnised the marriage of the beautiful with the practical." The words are nothing less than an invitation to set this union of practice and contemplation over against the saunterings of Thoreau and Emerson and others, who desired the romantic alone in nature and scorned laborious days. The comparison of their books may be misleading, for the Concord men were far above our gentleman farmer in the persuasive use of words; to make the point clear we should turn rather to more authoritative names, such as Wordsworth and Virgil. What, after all is the lesson of the *Excursion*, and how does it stand in naked veracity beside the *Georgics?* How does that "virgin passion of a soul, Communing with the glorious universe" measure beside the Roman's sober sense of toilsome duty? Wordsworth has compressed his reading of life into a melodious stanza:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can—

which, be it said with due respect, is good verse but literal folly. Nor does it yet appear a fact that idle revery in the fields is better for a man's soul than the discipline of Plato and Jesus. Certainly such is not the teaching of Virgil:

> Labor omnia vicit
> Improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas. . . .
> Omnia quæ multo ante memor provisa repones,
> Si te digna manet divini gloria ruris.

We are but *durum genus*, sprung from the soil, and only through harsh labour and faithful hoarding of experience shall we make our own the glory of the divine country.

And so I return to our lesser philosophers of New England and say boldly that more of the true wisdom of nature is to be found in Mr. Mitchell's story of Edgewood than in *Walden*. I know the canniness of Emerson's *Apology:*

> Think me not unkind and rude
> That I walk alone in grove and glen;
> I go to the god of the wood
> To fetch his word to men.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> One harvest from thy field
> Homeward brought the oxen strong;
> A second crop thine acres yield,
> Which I gather in a song.

But is the implication really sound? Nay, I doubt that the honest ploughman may carry back from the fields, buried deep in his heart and unexpressed, a masculine acquaintance with natural law such as the gazing rhapsodist shall never possess. Perhaps, as a child of the city, I may be barred out from judging these high matters. Yet I too have had my share of Thorellian vagabondage—who has not in these days?—and have even relived in humbler fashion the experiment of Walden. I know how easy it is to wander by the river's brink, meditating on the eternities, or to discover the Holy Grail in the chalice of a flower. Doubtless these solitary communings with nature are a desirable antidote to the fever of the world; they have their incalculable reward, but their very facility is a warning not to trust them too far. For my part, I shall suspect always that, failing the initiation of plough and harrow, I have still come short of the greater mysteries. It is something to observe idly the fresh miracles of spring, but I repeat the opening of the *Georgics* and know how far this is from the joy of feeling one's self a partner in the earth's great task of renovation. It is something to watch with unconcern the tempestuous glory of the clouds, but again I recall the storm in Virgil and know how different are the emotions of one who spells his prosperity or ruin in the portents of the sky. Alas, *labor improbus!* it is not facile enthusiasm alone, but the curse-born sweat of the brow that shall at last

bring a man into harmony with the stern realities of nature.[1] And even though unremitting toil benumb the fancy to the dulness of the day, there is left the wholesome instinct of the soil. Mr. Mitchell himself reduces this virtue to the lowest point:

> Rural life offers charming objects of study; but to most minds it does not offer the promptings for large intellectual exertion. It ripens healthfully all the receptive faculties; it disposes to that judicial calmness of mind which is essential to clearness and directness of vision; but it does not kindle the heat of large and ambitious endeavour. Hence we often find that a man who has passed the first half of his life in comparative isolation, cultivating his resources quietly, unmoved by the disturbances and the broils of civic life, will, on transfer to public scenes, and stirred by that emulation which comes of contact with the world, feel all his faculties lighted with a new glow, and accomplish results which are as much a wonder to himself as to others.

We go out, poor children of the city, to scamper up the mountain paths or loiter on the seashore, or mayhap, being country-bred, we make a profession of studying and discoursing nature. But never in this way, I believe, shall we possess the strength and silent instinct of the soil that are nurtured by working with the forces of earth and air, or the deeper yet still unuttered understanding that rewards such labour when crowned by

[1] Has any one thought to compare the curse in Genesis with the Virgilian *Pater ipse colendi Haut facilem esse viam voluit?*

observation and reflection. It is because I read something of this sacred experience in the Edgewood books, that I can prize them above their verbal merit.

As for the full story of Mr. Mitchell's own life, I do not know how far he has shared the common lot of evil and disappointment in his eighty-five years; I should not care to knock at the door of Edgewood and beg his acquaintance, for, gentle to all the rest of the world, he bristles with irascibility at the mere mention of editor or critic; but it is impossible to think of him otherwise than as rich in content, enjoying the harvest of a well-ploughed mind, sitting at this moment, it may be, amid his many books of husbandry, by the window that looks out over his farm, over the spires and belfries of New Haven, to the gleaming line of water and the lighthouse yonder upon the point. May we not once more, in taking leave of Mr. Mitchell, make use of the poet he has himself so often quoted, and liken his state to that of Virgil's old man of Tarentum who, in the possession of a few acres of exacting land, equalled in spirit the wealth of kings. But,

> . . . hæc ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis
> Prætereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo.

JAMES THOMSON ("B. V.").

TWENTY years ago, when I chanced upon *The City of Dreadful Night*, and for some time after that, I enjoyed in Thomson the flattering sense of proprietorship which comes with discovery. He was in fact almost unknown then, outside of England where he had his few but enthusiastic admirers, and it has been a matter of curious interest, not without a spark of pardonable jealousy, to observe the slow dissemination of his fame. Popular, indeed, he can never be, but the recent publication of a German monograph on his life and works[1] shows at least to what extent

[1] *James Thomson der Jüngere, sein Leben und seine Werke.* Dargestellt von Josefine Weissel. Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie, xxiv.—Like the earlier Wiener Beiträge, so far as I am familiar with them, this study possesses some value as a compendious statement of facts, but is otherwise a hodge-podge of stale pedantries. It sometimes seems as if to the German university mind the whole intellectual world between Kant and the Card Catalogue, between metaphysics and mechanism, were non-existent; as if it had no sense for the great practical region where life and books come together. The inconsiderate printing of doctoral and other perfunctory theses in Germany, and also in America, has grown to be a menace to sound learning. If they have any virtue, it is in dragging into the light of day the absurd theory that original production is the right dis-

he has been accepted as a significant factor in the literature of the nineteenth century. Such dubious honour at the hands of the *Seminar*, one feels, might have been spared the memory of a poet to whom life itself was a long indignity. And that life had already been told by H. S. Salt, well and sympathetically.

James Thomson—he signed his writings "B. V.", *i. e.*, Bysshe Vanolis, to avoid the name of the older poet and to mark his reverence for Shelley and Novalis—was born at Port Glasgow, November 23, 1834. When he was six years old his father, who was a sailor, came back from a distant voyage a helpless paralytic, living in this state until 1853. The family moved to East London, and from there, at the age of eight, James was admitted to the Royal Caledonian Asylum. At this time his mother died. She was, he says, "mystically inclined with Edward Irving," and "had also a cloud of melancholy overhanging her." Superstition, disease, poverty, and, one suspects, intemperance must have made the child's home scarcely more desirable than the Asylum. Writing to his sister-in-law in the last year of his life, he describes the change effected by the father's mishap:

> Before then I think he was a good husband and a kind father; her I always remember as a loving mother and

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cipline and the only test of scholarship. And now Thomson has received his crown of thorns at the court of the *Seminar*.

wife.... She was more serious, and pious too, following Irving from the Kirk when he was driven out. I remember well Irving's portrait under yellow gauze, and some books of his on the interpretation of prophecy, which I used to read for the imagery. The paralysis at first unhinged father's mind, and he had some fits of violence; more generally his temper was strange, disagreeable, not to be depended upon.... Before I went to the School he used to take me to chapels where the members of the congregation ejaculated groaning responses to the minister's prayer, and to small meetings in a private room where the members detailed their spiritual experiences of the week.

All these dreary things it is necessary to take into account when we pass judgment on Thomson's habits and works. He was, as he says, from his childhood an "Ishmael in the desert."

From the Caledonian he passed to the Royal Military Asylum at Chelsea, where he studied for a schoolmastership in the army, showing, as throughout life, marked ability in mathematics. His first position was that of assistant teacher at the garrison of Ballincollig, about five miles from Cork. Here he came under the care of a kind and intelligent garrison-master, Joseph Barnes, who, with his wife, made a second home for the brilliant young assistant. Here, too, he became acquainted with Charles Bradlaugh, the radical politician and atheist, then a soldier of the regiment, who remained his friend for more than twenty-three years, and who was a strong influence for good and evil in the poet's future life. Per-

haps even more important than this acquaintance, was his meeting with a fair and frail young girl of fourteen, named Matilda Weller, who was likened by Mrs. Barnes to Eva St. Clair in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a creature of "undulating and aërial grace, such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being.... Always dressed in white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places without contracting spot or stain." Though but little more than a child at the time—like Hardenberg's Sophie—she was betrothed to Thomson when, after a year and a half at Ballincollig, he returned to the Chelsea Normal School; in another six months he received the news of her death. Years afterward he sent six sonnets, not intended for publication, to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, and in one of them alluded to this bitter bereavement:

Indeed you set me in a happy place,
  Dear for itself and dearer much for you,
And dearest still for one life-crowning grace—
  Dearest, though infinitely saddest too:
For there my own Good Angel took my hand,
  And filled my soul with glory of her eyes,
And led me through the love-lit Faërie Land
  Which joins our common world to Paradise.
How soon, how soon, God called her from my side,
  Back to her own celestial sphere of day!
And, ever since she ceased to be my Guide,
  I reel and stumble on life's solemn way;
Ah, ever since her eyes withdrew their light,
I wander lost in blackest stormy night.

Here is a problem against which criticism has dashed itself and may continue to dash itself: Is it true, as he intimates, that this early loss was the cause of his reeling and stumbling—unfortunate metaphor !—down the way to ruin? Who shall decide? Who, seeing the shipwreck of a man's life, "and the pale master on his spar-strewn deck," shall say boldly it is due to this or that accident when the vessel left port, forgetting the trade-winds that blow despotic across that sea? Vain surmises. There is even a kind of callous inhumanity in groping too curiously among the obscurer elements of a complete and pitiful downfall. It is sufficient to know that through all the desolation and at times the terror of his future life that beautiful hope, turned now into a more radiant memory, never quite abandoned him. It speaks in many of his shorter poems; in *The Fadeless Bower* the passion of recollection fixes one moment of that episode into a changeless image, able, like Keats's "brede of marble men," to "tease us out of thought as doth eternity":

Behold her as she standeth there
  Breathless, with fixed, awe-shadowed eyes
Beneath her moon-touched golden hair!
  Her spirit's pure humilities
Are trembling, half would disavow
The crown I bring to crown her brow. . . .

O happy bud, for ever young,
  For ever just about to blow!
O happy love upon whose tongue

The Yes doth ever trembling grow!
O happiest Twain, whose deathless bower
Embalms you in life's crowning hour!

In *Vane's Story* the incidents of some actual dance of the old Irish days, told in the half humorous, half quizzical manner that Thomson always adopted in his more realistic vein, are joined to a vision of love stooping down to him as a celestial monitress and comforter:

How long in this sweet swoon I lay,
What hours or years I cannot say;
Vast arcs of the celestial sphere
Subtend such little angles here.
But after the ineffable,
This first I can remember well:
A Rose of Heaven, so dewy sweet
Its fragrance was a soul complete,
Came, touched my brow, caressed my lips,
And then my eyes in their eclipse;
And still I stirred not, though there came
A wine of fire through all my frame,
An ecstasy of joy and love,
A vision of the throne above,
A myriad-voiced triumphant psalm
Upswelling through a splendour calm;
Then suddenly, as if a door
Were shut, veiled silence as before.

In many of these poems there is a certain jarring note, as if the past still lived its own life within him unreconciled with the present, or as if two poets held the pen alternately; but in what are perhaps the best-known lines he ever wrote

this discord between memory and reality is itself raised into a symbol of intensely tragic fate. Every one who knows *The City of Dreadful Night* will recall his impression of awe, or perhaps of simple amazement, when he first came to the episode of the woman—"O desolation moving with such grace!"—with the red lamp, "her own burning heart," upon the seashore:

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: By the sea
She knelt and bent above that senseless me:
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair;
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
She heeded not the level rushing flow:
And mad with rage and fear,
I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: When the tide
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart:
They love; their doom is drear,
Yet they nor hope nor fear;
But I, what do I here?

It is customary, I do not know just why, to sneer rather sceptically at these ideal loves, these Lauras and Beatrices of the poets, as if they were all as imaginary as the mad Don's Dulcinea. And yet, in the case of such a life as Thomson's,

I should suppose it natural that the one gleam of perfect youthful happiness might in the first years of bustling ambition be forgotten, but that afterwards, when disappointment and despondency thickened upon him, it would return always at more frequent intervals, and with brighter radiance, gathering to itself all the light of broken hopes and wasted capabilities. How often in the nights of troubled sleep and feverish insomnia, for from this evil he suffered terribly, must the memory of that joy have flashed upon him with an importunity as keen as the vision of food to the starving castaway. There was no home with wife and children (for which he longed always with passionate regret) to mitigate his loss, no full and absorbing career.

For a while indeed he was busy enough. After leaving the Chelsea School the second time, being then scarcely twenty years of age, he was enlisted as army schoolmaster, and served at a number of posts, "pumping muddy information into unretentive sieves." In 1862 he was implicated in an offence against camp discipline, and was discharged because he would not give up the name of the actual culprit. He now came to London, where he got a clerkship in a solicitor's office, and began also to write for the magazines. For some time he lodged with Bradlaugh, then engaged in the affairs of the Secular party and in editing its political organ. His association with that uncompromising radical and free-thinker was,

as I have said, a doubtful benefit. It gave him, to be sure, a means of reaching the public when the more regular magazines were closed against him, and for ten or twelve years he contributed to the *National Reformer* his best work, including *The City of Dreadful Night*, which appeared in four consecutive issues. That periodical and *Cope's Tobacco Plant* were his chief source of income when his clerkship was given up. But I cannot help feeling that the atmosphere of universal dissent injured the finer qualities of his peculiar mind ; above all men he needed the rich sustaining influence of tradition and human brotherhood to soften the asperity of his individual lot. It is true commonly in poetry as in religion: *multum contrariatur supernæ visitationi falsa libertas animi.* Who can say how much the narrowness of his appeal and the sharp contraction of his pessimism are due to the egotism of this false liberty of mind?

But friends came to him gradually, and even a measure of fame. He corresponded with W. M. Rossetti; while George Eliot, George Meredith, the Brownings, and other choice spirits recognised his genius and wrote to him in language of encouraging flattery. Various engagements were opened to him. In 1872 he was sent to this country by a mining company, and for seven months he stayed among the Rocky Mountains, sending home letters of graphic description and humorous comment. The next year he went to Spain as special correspondent of the New York

World; but as he contributed only three letters in two months that connection was soon dissolved. His ruinous habit was already gaining on him, and year by year he became less trustworthy and less productive.

Everybody who has heard his name knows what that habit was. His taste for liquor seems to have been inherited, but did not show itself as a dangerous tendency until about 1855, when he was serving in the army. He was not a regular drinker, the thirst came upon him as a periodic disease, but with time the intervals of sobriety grew less and the lapses more terrible, so that his life might be compared with that of a Jekyll-Hyde, in which the demon slowly won the mastery. His last years were the tragedy of a great spirit hunted down and ashamed. There were kind friends who sought him for his brilliant conversation and magnanimity; he had always the more intimate friendship of books; but his life as a whole was, as he noted in his diary, "obscure, dismal, bewildered, and melancholy." The stanzas written on his forty-seventh birthday have the same note of final and irretrievable hopelessness as *The Nameless One* of Clarence Mangan. One who knew him in those days has left this deeply-etched portrait of his decay:

He looked like a veteran scarred in the fierce affrays of life's war and worn by the strain of its forced marches. His close-knit form, short and sturdy, might have endured any amount of mere roughings, if its owner had

thought it worth a care. It is rare to find so squarely massive a head, combining mathematical power with high imagination in so marked a degree. Hence the grim logic of fact that gives such weird force to all his poetry. You could see the shadow that "tremendous fate" had cast over that naturally buoyant nature. It had eaten great furrows into his broad brow, and cut tear-tracks downwards from his wistful eyes, so plaintive and brimful of unspeakable tenderness as they opened wide, when in serious talk. . . . I am far from saying that Thomson did not find any happiness in life. His wit and broad fun vied with his varied information and gift of happy talk in making him a prince of good fellows; and he least of all would be suspected of harbouring the worm in his jovial heart. But these were the glints of sunshine that made life tolerable ; the ever-smouldering fire of unassuageable grief and inextinguishable despair burned the core out of that great heart when the curtain of night hid the play-acting scenes of the day.

It is said that his last months were "a slow suicide, perceived and acquiesced in deliberately by himself." Death came to him in 1882, in his forty-eighth year, at the University Hospital.

The literary product of such a life was not likely to be large, or its quality of a kind to attract many readers. In 1895 Mr. Bertram Dobell tried the public with a complete edition of his writings; he actually brought out his Poetical Works in two volumes (to supersede the three original issues of 1880, 1881, and 1884), and in the next year a singe volume containing the *Biographical and Critical Studies;* but there was no encouragement to proceed with the edition.

For the rest, the *Essays and Phantasies* of 1881 can still be bought, though at a somewhat forbidding price, and there are two or three minor publications. It might seem that his prose at least should be popular. As a critic he is shrewd and original, somewhat over-romantic in taste, but always judicial in tone; the studies of Ben Jonson are particularly rich and variegated in interest. The miscellaneous essays show a surprising vein of humour and satire, with now and then a flaunting of gorgeous rhetoric which suggests a union of De Quincey and Poe. The probability is that his greater name as a poet of pessimism has deprived him of a good many readers who have been frightened away by that ugly word; in a very literal sense his reputation has become to him *nominis umbra*. And this is quite natural, for it is, after all, by his four pessimistic poems—*In the Room*, *Insomnia*, *The City of Dreadful Night*, and *To Our Ladies of Death*—that he has taken a unique place in English literature and will be remembered. Some, I dare say, would reckon *Vane's Story*, or *Weddah and Om-El-Bonain*, or one of his two Sunday idyls as more notable pieces of writing than *In the Room;* but there is something so singularly characteristic in this poem that it groups itself imperatively with the three acknowledged masterpieces. And in the grave and geometric simplicity of the stanzas; in the naïve complaints of mirror and table and curtain over their master, who, like another Chatter-

ton, lies heedless of everything; in the slow heightening of wonder and mistrust until the old bed in "ponderous bass" speaks out the fatal word:

"I know what is and what has been;
Not anything to me comes strange,
Who in so many years have seen
And lived through every kind of change.
I know when men are good or bad,
When well or ill," he slowly said;
"When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
And when they sleep alive or dead."

At this last word of solemn lore
A tremor circled through the gloom,
As if a crash upon the floor
Had jarred and shaken all the room:
For nearly all the listening things
Were old and worn, and knew what curse
Of violent change death often brings,
From good to bad, from bad to worse:—

in all this tragic-comic inversion of life wherein the man alone acts the dumb part, there is a literary effect which we so commonly hear about, but so rarely feel—a veritable shudder of the nerves. How often must Thomson himself as he sat in his London lodgings, in that rigid tension, perhaps, which preluded a return of dipsomania, have prefigured to himself a day when he too might lie "unconscious of the deep disgrace":

And while the black night nothing saw,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom; it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever moans and infant wails,
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.

I could wish that the flat twenty-fifth stanza had been blotted; and in the penultimate line of the eighth "and" is apparently a slip for *or*.

After *In the Room* the natural transition and contrast is *Insomnia* with its burden of torture that impelled the poet night after night to rove the streets of London. The stanza, more complicated in structure than Thomson generally employed, is handled with notable skill; the language is at once analytic and magnificent; here, as in the *Opium-Eater* of De Quincey, "the fierce chemistry of his dreams burns daily objects into insufferable splendour"; and yet withal the poem, owing to its overwrought artificiality, or, it may be, to its too visibly pathologic basis, leaves one colder than any of its three companion pieces. Its chief value (thematically, not chronologically) is as a preparation for *The City of Dreadful Night*, seen particularly in the form and imagery of one of the concluding stanzas:

Against a bridge's stony parapet
I leaned, and gazed into the waters black;
And marked an angry morning red and wet
Beneath a livid and enormous rack

Glare out confronting the belated moon,
Huddled and wan and feeble as the swoon
Of featureless Despair:
When some stray workman, half-asleep but lusty,
Passed urgent through the rainpour wild and gusty,
I felt a ghost already, planted watching there.

For this poem of unrelieved pessimism is simply the impressions of an insomniac changed from self-complaining to a phantom evocation of the London as he came to know it from his fierce nocturnal vigils—"the City is of Night, but not of Sleep":

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping:
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence!

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there, worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

In the sharpness of its outlines, in the balance of its members, there is something in *The City of Dreadful Night* that borders on the geometry of delirium. The body of the work is composed of

a series of brief cantos in a stanza of seven lines, as seen above, which, for its perfect fitness to the theme, must be reckoned one of the few remarkable inventions of prosody. The idea of the stanza was taken, as Thomson himself admits, from that of Browning's *Guardian Angel* in the *Dramatic Lyrics*, but the changes introduced by Thomson make it completely his own. Browning, to begin with, rhymed the seventh line with the first and third; by shifting this arrangement so as to rhyme together the second, fourth, and seventh, Thomson reduced eccentric formlessness to form, and gave to the three concluding lines the effect of a slow, melancholy refrain. A different use of the metrical pauses also, immediately felt by the reader but not easily described, adds a heavy, brooding quality to the rhythm quite foreign to Browning's impulsive temperament. Alternating with these descriptive cantos is a series of episodes, in which the narrative parts are in a common six-line stanza (ababcc), while the confessions, so to speak, of the *dramatis personæ* vary in metrical form according to their mood. The whole poem is like the phantasmagoria of a fever subdued to mathematical restraint, or the clamour of mad grief trained into remorseless logic. In the concluding vision of the "Melencolia" of Albert Dürer, seated aloft as queen of that people and symbol of their fate, the union of these qualities rises into the very enthusiasm and sublime of resignation:

. . . The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
Confronting them with a coëval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.

No one knew better than Thomson himself that this is not the City of all the world; indeed, the very sting of his grief is the feeling of isolation from the common lot. Few men tread those streets of denial and gloom habitually, but many have been there at one time of their lives and carry with them always, somewhere hidden from view, the badge of citizenship in that "sad Fraternity." To these, as well as to the few like-fated with the poet, his words will still have a meaning:

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all disastrous fight;
"I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

The sequel to *The City of Dreadful Night* is the poem *To Our Ladies of Death*, written in the same seven-line stanza. The only change is the substitution of a single for a double rhyme in the couplet, reducing the lyrical clangour of the rhythm to a more contemplative calm. The idea was suggested, as Thomson records, by "the sublime sisterhood of Our Ladies of Sorrow, in the *Suspiria de Profundis* of De Quincey"; but for the three Sorrows we now have the three conceptions of Death—Our Lady of Beatitudes, the gracious mother, on whom the broken and hopeless dare not call; Our Lady of Annihilation, who waits with her scourge "the selfish, fatuous, proud, and pitiless"; and, last, Our Lady of Oblivion, who gathers to her breast "the weak, the weary, and the desolate," and to whom the wanderer in the City of Night makes his plea:

Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep;
Down, down, far-hidden in thy duskiest cave;
While all the clamorous years above me sweep
Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave
On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,
A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance
The restful rapture of the inviolate grave.

And so the cycle is made complete—from the sordid tragedy of the poet's room, through the terrible unforgetfulness of insomnia, to the conception of all life as a City of Night, and the despairing cry for the consummation of oblivion. Together the four poems present a rounded philosophy of pessimism, which stands quite alone in English literature, and which has, I believe, no precise equivalent in any language.

Pessimism is a word of many ambiguities, and needs defining. It is commonly applied to the Hindus, who in their better days were the least of all peoples open to that charge. To both Brahmin and Buddhist the representation of life as made up wholly of sorrow and mutability was but the foil to infinite exultant faith ; the shadow of the earth was all black because the light of the spirit was so transcendentally pure.[1] That name might seem to belong more properly to the Greeks, whose philosophy of life, when it came to conscious expression, was summed up in the maxim of the plodding, commonplace Theognis: "Not to be born is the best of all things for creatures of this world, nor to behold the beams of the bright sun ; after birth the best is to pass as speedily as possible through the gates of death and to lie shrouded in much earth." Yet no one thinks of

[1] Schopenhauer accepted and attempted to reproduce the darker half of Buddhism, but was blind to the spiritual joys of that faith. He is therefore a thoroughly deceptive interpreter of India.

calling the Greeks pessimistic; their health was too bountiful, the impulse to live and enjoy was too strong. Pessimism is always individual, and not national, and comes when self-consciousness, unbalanced by spiritual insight, is developed at the expense of irrational instinct. The great exemplar of that inverted faith in antiquity was the Roman Lucretius—mad perhaps by the administration of a love-potion, mad certainly at the thought of the human soul caught up into the dizzy whirl of atoms falling together into fortuitous worlds and again drifting into wild chaos:

> For it seem'd
> A void was made in Nature; all her bonds
> Crack'd; and I saw the flaring atom-streams
> And torrents of her myriad universe,
> Ruining along the illimitable inane,
> Fly on to clash together again, and make
> Another and another frame of things
> For ever; that was mine, my dream, I knew it.

That was the dream to which the science of his day had brought him, and it is the dream to which the purely scientific interpretation of life must then and always bring any mind that has developed to full self-consciousness. It is, more particularly, the pessimism that lurks, unawakened or stunned by multifarious noise, in the background of our present eager civilisation. In Lucretius that vision was accompanied with a passionate desire for the rest of perfect oblivion, and with a more passionate protest against a re-

ligion which would make the gods responsible for this jolting mechanism and capable of prolonging man's life beyond the grave to be ground forever in these unresting wheels:

O genus infelix humanum, talia divis
Cum tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit acerbas!
Quantos tum gemitus ipsi tibi, quantaque nobis
Volnera, quas lacrimas peperere minoribu' nostris!

The successor to Lucretius in modern times is another Italian, Leopardi, in whose firmly-moulded periods and chastened passion something of the great form and spirit of the Roman seems to have survived. And the charge of Leopardi, if we omit the more personal tone of Christian times, is the same as that of Lucretius: bewilderment at the meaningless and unresting motion of all celestial and earthly things, with longing for the peace, if not the beatitude, of death.

It does not appear that Thomson was specially versed in Lucretius, whereas Leopardi was the acknowledged master to whom his *City of Dreadful Night* was dedicated[1]; yet in some ways he is

[1] He quotes the resonant lines of Leopardi:

"Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D' ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so."

. . . . . .

nearer in tone to the old Roman than to the modern Italian. More than one of Thomson's stanzas, with its bitter denial of a God who could spin for his pleasure all these follies of creation, or with its horror of a living eternity, rings like an echo of the *Tantum religio*. And there is the same poetic fury in his vision of infinite motion. Read the first of his prose *Phantasies*, in which the Shadow of Sorrow leads him at night into the thoroughfares of London :

The continuous thunders, swelling, subsiding, resurgent, the innumerable processions, confound and overwhelm my spirit, until as of old I cannot believe myself walking awake in a substantial city amongst real persons.... As my eyes fix and dilate into vision more entranced of the supreme and awful mystery, the brow-

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"Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volve
Ogni creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura ;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell' antico dolor. . . .
Però ch' esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato."

"In all this labour, all these motions of every celestial, every earthly thing, revolving without rest, always to return thither whence they started, I can divine no use, no fruit."

"In thee only eternal in the world, to whom every created thing inclines, in thee, death, our naked nature rests ; not happy, but secure from the ancient pain. . . . For to be blessed is denied to mortals and to the dead by fate."

brain upon my eyes expands and protends into a vast shadowy theatre for processions more multitudinous and solemn. The lamps withdraw and ascend, and become wayward meteors of the night; the night itself grows very dark, yet wherever I gaze I can discern, seeing by darkness as commonly we see by light; the houses recede and swell into black rock-walls and shapeless mounds of gloom; the long street is a broad road levelled forthright from world's end to world's end. All of human kind that have ever lived, with all that are now living and all that are being born into life, all the members of the æons of humanity, compose the solemn procession....

This resolution of the seemingly stable world into an endless chain of spectral forms may be the vision of disease; its realism is no doubt the beginning of delirium; yet at bottom what is it more than the prospect of universal permutation that swam before the gaze of the ancient Epicurean? What is it more than the poetic imagination stung to frenzy by the scientific conception of universal motion? Or in what does it differ from the vast processions that thronged before the eye of Walt Whitman and that, but for his exuberant animalism, would have troubled our optimist with the same repulsion of fear? This is the ground which pessimism seeks always for its building.

Yet I would not imply that Thomson is in all respects akin to Lucretius, any more than I would equal him in renown to that mighty poet. The magnificent audacity is not here, the Roman courage to deny defeat, the supreme confidence

in the power of the human will to lay violent hold upon happiness if once the benumbing chains of superstition were broken. Nor must he be confounded with Leopardi. He lacks the intense patriotism which taught the Italian to sink his personal grievance against Fate in indignation over the long miseries of his people; above all, he lacks that deeper insight which once or twice lifts Leopardi out of pessimism into mystic self-surrender. There may be here and there something like acquiescence in his thought of resolution after death into the forces of creative Nature[1]; but there is in all his works nothing that corresponds to Leopardi's brief and perfect rhapsody, *L'Infinito*, with its haunting conclusion:

E il naufragar m' è dolce in questo mare.

One is never permitted quite to escape the narrower, personal outlook in Thomson, or to forget that only his peculiar disabilities prevent him from disavowing his philosophy in the common cares and sympathies of mankind:

[1] As in the concluding stanzas of *Our Ladies of Death:*

"But if this cannot be, no less I cry,
Come, lead me with thy terrorless control
Down to our Mother's bosom, there to die
By abdication of my separate soul:
So shall this single, self-impelling piece
Of mechanism from lone labour cease,
Resolving into union with the Whole."...

This chance was never offered me before;
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb:
This chance recurreth never, nevermore;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion; and my breath
Of noble human life upon the earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

Lucretius may be said to speak for rebellious mankind, Leopardi for the patriot who merges his personal grievance in despondency over his nation, Thomson for the individual who feels himself cut off by circumstances from the common illusion of happiness. Of all three the pessimism is connected with the notion of man as an integral part of nature, subject wholly to natural law, and with the terror which arises when a heightened self-consciousness, without the stay of healthy animal instincts, finds itself confronted by the vision of all-involving motion and permutation. So necessary for the soul is some place of stability outside of nature's vortex that, if no other peace is allowed, it will make its account with death:

As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain!

The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

While air of Space and Time's full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so:
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

Man might know one thing were his sight less dim;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.

CHESTERFIELD

A life of Lord Chesterfield [1] devoted almost exclusively to the political career of that arbiter of elegancies might seem to promise an oddly distorted portrait. Yet we may find our profit in Mr. Craig's well-meant, if carelessly composed, work. It will at least do something to modify the contemptuous ignorance which passes commonly for a judgment of his lordship, and which, for one reason or another, has overtaken most of the men who fought in the Opposition to that right British master, Sir Robert Walpole. And a sober consideration of his career brings also a new element into our opinion of his Letters. We are likely to look with more lenience on his reiterated preaching of politeness and superficial address when we remember that in active life he himself played an honourable and manly part. The second member of his favourite motto, *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*, assumes a just proportion to the first by a comparison of his acts with his words.

Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of

[1] *Life of Lord Chesterfield.* An Account of the Ancestry, Personal Character, and Public Services of the Fourth Earl of Chesterfield. By W. H. Craig. New York : John Lane Co. 1907.

Chesterfield, came of a distinguished house, so ancient that he could safely ridicule the vanity of birth by setting up portraits of Adam and Eve de Stanhope in his family gallery, and by calling it, in one of his *World* papers, "the child of Pride and Folly, coupled together by that industrious pander Self-love." He was born in St. James's Square, London, in 1694. His father, the third Earl, seems to have been more distinguished by stubbornness than any other quality; being a strong Jacobite, he punished his heir's Hanoverian tendencies by cutting his allowance down to five hundred pounds a year, and, for his other traits, we may suppose that Swift exaggerated a little when he wrote: "If it be old Chesterfield, I have heard he was the greatest knave in England." The son lived not at home, but with his maternal grandmother, the excellent Marchioness of Halifax,[1] who indulged his bent and kept him out of school until, at the age of eighteen, he was entered at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Here apparently he combined the studious and the rakish life, with a predominance of the former. At any rate, he steeped himself in the Classics, and began that discipline in the precise use of language which made him one of the first masters of Eng-

[1] It has been remarked that in intellect and temperament he was more of a Savile than a Stanhope, and a comparison of his writings with those of his grandfather, the first Marquis of Halifax, fully confirms the observation.

lish. His method of study he explained later to his son: "So long ago as when I was at Cambridge, whenever I read pieces of eloquence (and indeed they were my principal study), whether ancient or modern, I used to write down the shining passages, and then translate them as well and as elegantly as ever I could; if Latin or French, into English; if English, into French." At nineteen he left the university, if we may believe his own words, as precious a pedant as ever went up to London: when he talked best, he talked Horace; his wit was to quote Martial, and his notion of a fine gentleman to follow Ovid. He never forgave the university for sending him out with this tincture of scholasticism, and his unrelenting rancour inclines one to believe that his accounts of a blundering start in society are not a commonplace fiction for pointing a moral. And indeed, as his perfected manners were the polish of a sensitive egotism, it is natural that his entrance upon the world should have been marked by a bashful self-consciousness. He would not permit his son to go either to Cambridge or Oxford. His letters speak of the universities always with hatred and contempt, and one of his journalistic portraits of a boor repeats the theme: "As he had resided long in college, he had contracted all the habits, prejudices, the laziness, the soaking, the pride, and the pedantry of a cloister, which after a certain time are never to be rubbed off."

It need not be said that Chesterfield soon rubbed off his *mauvaise honte* by contact with the world. For some years he served in the lower house of Parliament with indifferent success. At the age of thirty-one he succeeded to the earldom by the death of his father, and began his real career, being better fitted by temperament and education for influence among the Lords than among the Commons. Two periods of his political activity stand out prominently: his mission as ambassador to The Hague from 1728 to 1732, and his vice-royalty of Ireland in 1745–46; in both which offices he showed undoubted ability. At The Hague, where the tangled dynastic relations of Europe were debated, he kept his head and maintained the honour of England—and no man could do more. To Ireland he gave for eight memorable months a happy government, showing a peculiar sympathy for that tormented people. Some of his best-known witticisms come from Dublin, and his wit, together with his firm tolerance, was an important element in his success. "I would much rather," he once said, "be distinguished and remembered by the name of the *Irish Lord-Lieutenant* than by that of Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland." Again, at a critical moment, when the Castle officials brought him word in the morning that "the people of Connaught were actually rising," he first gravely consulted his watch and then replied with composure: "Well, it is nine o'clock, and certainly time for them to

rise; I therefore believe your news to be true." Nor did he lose his interest in the people after his return. Throughout his later correspondence with Irish friends he was constant in his support of the paper and linen manufactures, by which he hoped the country could be brought to efficient independence.

In the interval between his residence at The Hague and in Dublin he was, until Walpole's downfall in 1742, a member of the cabal which led the Opposition and gave hostility to that minister the name of Patriotism. Chesterfield's part in the political game was an active, but not the leading, one. He had neither the virulent pen nor the personal weight of Bolingbroke; he could not intrigue with the trimming Pulteney, or contend against the domineering, gusty Carteret; but he wrote and spoke much, and took his part in the harrying of the great Parliamentary boar. After his return from Ireland, he was for a while Secretary of State in the Broad-bottom ministry of the Pelhams, but gradually dropped out of the arena into the quiet of a valetudinary old age that fluttered between the magnificent library of Chesterfield House in South Audley Street and his gardens and *Babiole* at Blackheath. "I am now, for the first time in my life," he writes to an old friend in 1753, "impatient for the summer, that I may go and hide myself at Blackheath and converse with my vegetables *d'égal à égal*, which is all that a deaf man can pretend to. . . . The

place agrees with my health and becomes my present situation. It employs my eyes, my own legs, and my horse's agreeably without having any demand upon my ears, so that I almost forget sometimes I have lost them." As for the library in his city house, it was one of the spectacles of London, and still exists, little changed. In 1845, a writer in the *Quarterly Review* thus described,

> What [Chesterfield] boasted of as "the finest room in London"—and perhaps even now it remains unsurpassed—his spacious and beautiful library, looking on the finest private garden in London. The walls are covered half-way up with rich and classical stores of literature; above the cases are, in close series, the portraits of eminent authors, French and English, with most of whom he had conversed. Over these and immediately under the massive cornice, extend all round in foot-long capitals the Horatian lines:
>
> Nunc veterum libris. Nunc somno et inertibus horis.
> Ducere solicitæ jucunda oblivia vitæ.
>
> On the mantelpiece and cabinets stand busts of old orators, interspersed with voluptuous vases and bronzes, antique or Italian, and airy statuettes in marble or alabaster of nude or semi-nude opera nymphs.

Stoic we may believe the oblivion of the half-cloistered wit, deaf and broken in health, to have been, but *jocund* never. "Physical ills," he writes, "are the taxes laid upon this wretched life; some are taxed higher, and some lower, but all pay something. My philosophy teaches me to reflect how much higher, rather than how much lower, I might have been taxed." And

again: "I read a good deal, and vary occasionally my dead company. I converse with grave folios in the morning, while my head is clearest and my attention strongest; I take up less severe quartos after dinner; and at night I choose the mixed company and amusing chit-chat of octavos and duodecimos. *Je tire parti de tout ce que je puis;* that is my philosophy; and I mitigate, as much as I can, my physical ills by diverting my attention to other objects." It is the *savoir vieillir*, the bland resignation of the man of the world, such as we meet in page after page of the letters of Horace Walpole, like Chesterfield, old and gouty. "Visions," wrote Walpole "are the consolation of life; it is wise to indulge them, unless one builds on them as realities. Our dreams are almost at an end! Mine are mixed with pain; yet I think it does not make me peevish. I accept with thankfulness every hour in which I do not suffer. I am not impatient for the moment that will terminate both anguish and cheerfulness, and I endeavour to form my mind to resigning the first with gratitude, and the latter with submission." The visions of Chesterfield, we may fancy, were more solid than those of the epicure of Strawberry Hill. He had seen the great world, and knew men and manners. From those perpetual friends, his books, he could turn to living memories of Mr. Addison and Mr. Pope, in whose company, as he wrote, he used to feel in society as much above himself as if he had

been with all the princes in Europe. The quarrels and reconciliations of those mighty wits, no doubt, he reflected upon much, as also upon the coarser battles of the politicians, including the relentless Lord Bolingbroke. Much, too, he must have thought of the flutter of more effeminate society, and of his own reputation as the glass of form, given so grudgingly by his rivals, won with such pains to himself. There was a world of recollections to occupy the gouty and somewhat lonely old gentleman in his chair.

We can almost see him in his library by his garden window, a frail and uncomely figure, the eyes, beneath the bushy high-arched brows, large and touched with pain; the mouth small and lifted in a half-kindly, half-cynical smile; the chin heavy, but rounded to a point. So Gainsborough painted him, and so the face appears, not without nobility and power, in most of the memoirs of the day. But the voice was shrill and the body curiously awkward. Plain-speaking George II. calls him a "dwarf baboon," and handsome Hervey, Pope's "white curd of ass's milk," who has no love for his person or respect for his morals, will not even allow dignity to the countenance:

> With a person as disagreeable as it was possible for a human figure to be without being deformed, he affected following many women of the first beauty and the most in fashion; and, if you would have taken his word for it, not without success; whilst in fact and in truth he

never gained any one above the venal rank of those whom an Adonis or a Vulcan might be equally well with, for an equal sum of money.[1] He was very short, disproportioned, thick, and clumsily made; had a broad [it is narrow in the portraits], rough-featured, ugly face, with black teeth [he alludes himself to this defect], and a head big enough for a Polyphemus. One Ben Ashurst, who said few good things, though admired for many, told Lord Chesterfield once that he was like a stunted giant—which was a humorous idea and really apposite. Such a thing would disconcert Lord Chesterfield as much as it would have done anybody who had neither his wit nor his assurance on other occasions; for though he could attack vigorously, he could defend but weakly, his quickness never showing itself in reply, any more than his understanding in argument.

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[1] The same insinuation may be found elsewhere. But Hervey was, perhaps, a little embittered by the somewhat scandalous ballad to his lovely wife, attributed conjointly to the Earls of Chesterfield and Bath:

"The Muses, quite jaded with rhyming,
To Molly Mogg bid a farewell;
But renew their sweet melody, chiming
To the name of dear Molly Lepel!

"Bright Venus yet never saw bedded
So perfect a beau and a belle,
As when Hervey the handsome was wedded
To the beautiful Molly Lepel!" . . .

Complimentary enough, but the sting comes later. Chesterfield's marriage to Melusina de Schulemburg, daughter of George I. and the Duchess of Kendall, neither young nor attractive, but rich, was as prosaic as possible, but there is a hint of romance in the story of Fanny Shirley, whom in his younger years he saw enough of at Twickenham to start the sly tongue of gossip a-wagging. Charles Hanbury Williams, the li-

Lord Hervey's report of this encounter with Ben Ashurst might be used as a simile of the Parliamentary contest between Chesterfield and Sir Robert. And in other respects the description is something more than gossip; it helps to explain the exaggerated insistence upon form and manner in a man who could leave nothing to nature, but must win his reputation entirely by art. We must remember always that the great Earl, in writing to an ungainly son, had had also his own ungainliness to overcome.

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censed satirist of society, put them into limping verse:

"Says Lovel—There were Chesterfield and Fanny,
In that eternal whisper which begun
Ten years ago, and never will be done."

To Chesterfield was accredited (though it was more likely from the hand of Thomas Phillips) the ballad upon her, "When Fanny, blooming fair," which Horace Walpole had parodied:

"Here Fanny, 'ever blooming fair,'
Ejaculates the graceful prayer;
And 'scaped from sense, with nonsense smit,
For Whitfield's cant leaves Stanhope's wit."

There are several allusions to her pitiable old age in Walpole's Letters: "'Fanny, blooming fair,' died yesterday of a stroke of palsy. She had lost her memory for some years, and remembered nothing but her beauty and not her Methodism. Being confined with only servants, she was continually lamenting, 'I to be abandoned that all the world used to adore!' She was seventy-two."—Such strange gleams of pathos shine through the wit of that period.

And we must remember, too, that his passionate interest in the son's ambition arose in part from a feeling that his own career had fallen short of what his powers promised. He had held office and had won respect as a speaker in Parliament, yet his actual weight in the Government, or against it, was never equal to his capabilities; and of this he seems to have been painfully conscious. We may give various reasons for this partial thwarting of his hopes, but the truth probably lies in Hervey's caustic words:

> Lord Chesterfield was allowed by everybody to have more conversible entertaining table-wit than any man of his time; his propensity to ridicule, in which he indulged himself with infinite humour and no distinction, and with inexhaustible spirits and no discretion, made him sought and feared, liked and not loved, by most of his acquaintance; no sex, no relation, no rank, no power, no profession, no friendship, no obligation was a shield from those pointed, glittering weapons, that seemed to shine only to a stander-by, but cut deep in those they touched. . . . I remember two lines in a satire of Boileau's that fit him exactly:
>
> Mais c'est un petit fou qui se croit tout permis,
> Et qui pour un bon mot va perdre vingt amis.
>
> And as his lordship, for want of principle, often sacrificed his character to his interest, so by these means he as often, for want of prudence, sacrificed his interest to his vanity.[1]

[1] Compare Burnet's portrait of Halifax: "He was a man of a quiet and ready wit: full of life and very

The fact is his lordship was not much liked or trusted. From the King down he made men feel the inferiority of their minds, and this, in an age when politics were so completely personal, was in itself enough to ruin him. And, besides, he did not play the game. Bribery and corruption were the tools of administration used notoriously by Walpole, as they were in turn by the protesting Patriots; now Chesterfield would not take a bribe, and is one of the few men who came out of public life with clean hands. So much was to his honour and not against his influence; but he had an uncomfortable way of failing to see that other men might pocket their rewards and still be honest within the acknowledged rules of the sport. He lacked apparently the first requisite of political *savoir vivre*, and in this he was coupled with Lord Carteret: "They both of them, too, treated all principles of honesty and integrity with such open contempt that they seemed to think the appearance of those qualities would be of as little use to them as the reality, which

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pleasant; much turned to satire. He let his wit run much on matters of religion, so that he passed for a bold and determined atheist; though he often protested to me he was not one; said he believed there was not one in the world. . . . The liveliness of his imagination was always too hard for his judgment. A severe jest was preferred by him to all arguments whatsoever." Lord Dartmouth gives him the same character.

must certainly be impolitic, since always to ridicule those who are swayed by such principles was telling all their acquaintance, 'If you do not behave to me like knaves, I shall either distrust you as hypocrites or laugh at you as fools.'" After following Chesterfield's career in all its details and allowing credit to his incorruptibility and his occasional efficiency, one still returns, unfairly it may be, to the judgment of Horace Walpole on reading his Letters: "Yet in all that great character what was there worth remembering but his *bons mots?* . . . from politics he rather escaped well, than succeeded by them:" — so dangerous is the reputation for wit.

As a maker of epigrams, rather than as a statesman, he moves through the records of the age, and it should seem that people looked for his inevitable witticism at every occurrence in the government or society. So Mrs. Montagu sends to her husband "an admirable *bon mot* of Lord Chesterfield's" on the perplexities of George III. just come to the throne: "He said the King was in doubt whether he should burn Scotch coal [Bute], Pitt coal, or Newcastle coal." And Horace Walpole, as part of the regular news of the day, writes to Horace Mann, "two new *bon mots* of his lordship much repeated, better than his ordinary." At another time, after relating an outrageously wicked retort to Mrs. Ann Pitt, Chatham's sister, he breaks out:

"What gaiety and spirit at seventy-five, and how prettily expressed! It contains the cheerfulness of the wars of the Fronde in France."

On one occasion Lord Chesterfield left the retirement of his library and gardens, and what he then accomplished was the proudest achievement of his life. In 1582 Gregory XIII. had reformed the calendar, and all the countries of Europe, except England, Russia, and Sweden, had adopted the New Style. As a consequence, there were in Chesterfield's day two different methods of reckoning dates, an inconvenience which had been impressed upon him by the difficulties of correspondence during his embassy to The Hague. In 1751 he had a bill introduced in Parliament by which the year henceforth should begin the 1st January, instead of the 25th March, and the eleven superfluous days should be voided by calling the 3d September, 1752, the 14th. Superstition, habit, and the embarrassment of altering contract dates combined to oppose the bill, but with the aid of Henry Pelham, who was prime minister, and of the Lord Chancellor Macclesfield, it was passed in the end. He was fond of repeating the story of the triumph to his son in that vein of didactic modesty so peculiarly his own. March 18, O. S., 1751, he wrote:

I was to bring in this bill, which was necessarily composed of law jargon and astronomical calculations, to both of which I am an utter stranger. However, it was abso-

lutely necessary to make the House of Lords think that I knew something of the matter, and also to make them believe that they knew something of it themselves, which they do not. For my own part, I could just as soon have talked Celtic or Sclavonian to them as astronomy, and they would have understood me full as well; so I resolved to do better than speak to the purpose, and to please instead of informing them. I gave them, therefore, only an historical account of caleudars, from the Egyptian down to the Gregorian, amusing them now and then with little episodes; but I was particularly attentive to the choice of my words, to the harmony and roundness of my periods, to my elocution, to my action. This succeeded, and ever will succeed: they thought I informed, because I pleased them; and many of them said that I had made the whole very clear to them, when, God knows, I had not even attempted it. Lord Macclesfield, who had the greatest share in forming the bill, and who is one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers in Europe, spoke afterwards with infinite knowledge and all the clearness that so intricate a matter would admit of; but as his words, his periods, and his utterance, were not near so good as mine, the preference was most unanimously, though most unjustly, given to me.

After this incursion into public life, he returned to valetudinarian ways, preparing himself with tranquil stoicism for the end, ever ready with a jest or a sententious fling at destiny. He reminds one of Franklin, without Franklin's great body and without his imperturbability. "Not so loud," he replied to one who accosted him in the street walking with a friend. "The fact is that Tyrawley and I have been dead these two years, only we don't wish it to be generally known." It is like

Franklin's "I seem to have intruded myself into the company of posterity, when I ought to have been abed and asleep." Eight years before his death he was in a mood to write to his son: "I feel the beginning of the autumn, which is already very cold; the leaves are withered, fall apace, and seem to intimate that I must follow them; which I shall do without reluctance, being extremely weary of this silly world." Everybody knows his last words—they are classic—spoken when the *valet de chambre* opened the curtains of his bed and announced his old and well-tried friend: "Give Dayrolles a chair." That act of formal courtesy should be added to the illustrations of Pope's ruling passion strong in death.

He died 24 March, 1773, leaving the tradition of his wit to be taken up by such lesser men as George Selwyn, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Sydney Smith.

Lord Chesterfield's letters are divided into two distinct collections, those to various correspondents on Political and Miscellaneous topics and those To his Son on Education. They are alike in the dry light, the almost pitiless clarity of intelligence, which they throw upon all the affairs of life, but in other respects they are naturally diverse. One is impressed in the general collection by the shrewd understanding of men and movements which again and again predicts the shifting political combinations of the age. Nor did he fail to observe the larger currents of national des-

tiny, as in his insight into the condition of France, the clearest expression of which occurs, however, in a letter to his son : " In short, all the symptoms which I have ever met with in history previous to great changes and revolutions in government, now exist and daily increase in France." With this insight goes an irresistible impulse to elucidate and advise; there is, in fact, just a touch of the schoolmaster, strangely compounded with the fine gentleman, in his inveterate didacticism. In his friendships generally, few but enduring, he maintains a kind of discreet enthusiasm, rising in the correspondence with one or two French ladies to a really exquisite gallantry. Was ever a prettier compliment turned than that by which he made his desire to conform his dates to those of Madame de Monconseil the cause of reforming the British calendar? The whole letter (11 Avril, V. S., 1751) should be read in connection with that to his son a month earlier, to see with what refinement of address he turns the same notable act to the uses of pedagogy and courtesy. There is the proud self-effacement of the good teacher in the one, as of the courtly gentleman in the other : " Mais enfin voilà votre style établi ici. Voyez par là comment le public ignore presque toujours les véritables causes des évènements ; car il ne vous soupçonne pas d'entrer pour quelque chose dans celui-ci."

But it is the long series of letters to his son that have made the name of Chesterfield to be a living

symbol. No legitimate children were born to him, but while at The Hague he had formed a *liaison* with a certain Madame du Bouchet, governess in a wealthy Dutch family, who followed him to England and lived there quietly on an allowance during his life. In 1732, their son, Philip Stanhope, was born. In the care of this boy the father and the pedagogue combined in Chesterfield to produce an overpowering anxiety; and never was legitimate child trained and pushed in the world with such unwearied assiduity. He was educated under the best masters and then sent, with a "bear-leader," to the Continent for years to be ripened and *decrotté*. Parliament and diplomacy were both opened to him, but in the end, owing in part to the stigma of his birth and in part to an invincible clumsiness of manner, he proved little better than a failure. In 1768 his death revealed the fact that he had been secretly married to a lady, who made profit of the connection by selling the Earl's treasured letters to her husband for £1,575. They were published in 1774, to the scandal of the family and of England.

In truth, few men dared at the time to defend these extraordinary documents. Horace Walpole was shocked by their naked candour. "A most proper book of laws," he calls them, "for the generation in which it is published"; they have "reduced the folly and worthlessness of the age to a regular system." But all the world read them, even though, like John Wesley, they were

horrified at the picture of this cunning libertine "studiously instilling into the young man all the principles of debauchery, when he himself was between seventy and eighty years old." Dr. Johnson, with more vigour than justice, had already, in his terrible satire of the patron, held Chesterfield up to contempt, and now he flung upon the author of the Letters a hideous phrase which no amount of palliation can ever quite obliterate. These things occurred toward the end of the century, when the age was in a somewhat repentant mood for its sins. Having become established in virtue, the world to-day can afford to be a little more lenient—and just. For really the manners taught by Lord Chesterfield were not those of a dancing master, nor the morals—what Dr. Johnson was permitted to call them. There is enough to excuse without any such distortion of the truth as this, and, for the most part, Chesterfield's morals are very much those of his age.

Nor would it be just to condemn his frankness of expression on the principle of *pueris reverentia*. It must be remembered always that they were written to an illegitimate son, to whom the preaching of rigid virtue would imply either repentance or hypocrisy on the part of the writer, and Chesterfield was neither repentant nor hypocritic. It must be remembered also that they were never intended for publication, and this for their literary as well as their moral qualities. Their greatest

fault as compositions is a certain monotony arising from endless repetition of the same theme, very useful in pressing home the desired lesson, but rather irksome when the Letters are read together. Their chief excellence is their style, for which our admiration must be heightened by knowing they were entirely unpremeditated. To one who takes pleasure in the sheer mastery of a difficult artistic medium, the language of Lord Chesterfield must be a continual wonder and joy. He had not the measured eloquence of Bolingbroke, the gravity of Dr. Johnson, the naïve grace of Goldsmith, the homely elegance of Cowper, or the idiomatic ease of Gray; his style lacks colour and magnetism; but he had other qualities which make his Letters on the whole the finest models of English of the mid-eighteenth century, beside which most writing in our tongue seems to wallow unwieldy. It is distinguished for precision, unfaltering directness, and a kind of splendid clearness. It cannot be judged from specimens, for its effect depends on sustained balance of tone; there are no purple patches. To read it is to feel such an exhilaration as comes from watching the swift, thin motion of a foil in the hand of a skilled fencer—and the foil has no button. We have seen how he trained himself as a stylist while at college, but his real masters were the great French writers, whom he knew personally and imitated, and by whom he was in turn looked upon as *l'homme le plus spirituel des trois royaumes.* He had helped to introduce

Voltaire and Montesquieu to British philosophy and government, and had filched from them the mysteries of French prose. His English is thoroughly idiomatic, but there is not the slightest jar in passing from his letters in that language to those in French scattered through the collection.

And from France also he borrowed another trait. Englishmen are not frank, or, perhaps, not logical. There is grossness and plain-speaking aplenty in their letters throughout the eighteenth century, but it is sheer naughtiness; they rarely deny the convention of morality. Now Chesterfield was French in conforming his standards with his acts. One finds extremely little of the contemporary coarseness in his Letters, but they accept unreservedly and, indeed, unblushingly inculcate the practical code of society as he knew it. They are overwhelmingly honest, honest in a far higher sense than can be applied, for instance, to the garrulous self-revelation of a Pepys, or to the portrait of a creature of impulse like Tom Jones. Here, if anywhere, the man of the world, the *honnête homme*, as he then was, and as, at heart, he still is, stands exhibited; there is something almost sublime in the dry unshrinking light cast upon him. And if much must be reprobated in that character, much also is admirable and at all times worthy of imitation. He was the late product of an art which has practically passed from the world. We are concerned to-day about our duties and our pleasures, and

about the means of making life efficient; but who is concerned to mould his life into an artistic design? We write enormously of all the mechanical arts, but where is to be found a modern treatise on the one supreme art of living? It did not use to be so, as any one knows who has read the literature of the Renaissance.

It would carry me too far, even if I had the material at hand, to trace the development of this conception of life as one of the fine arts. There are hints of it in Xenophon and Horace and other writers of antiquity, but its real origin would be found in the engrafting of the classical sense of decorum on the mediæval ideal of chivalry. Petrarch's sonnets and letters may be regarded as the opening of the voluminous literature that sprang up on the subject, and the *Decameron*, with its bravely ordained delights against the background of the mortal plague, started its course in fiction.[1] From these sources the art became gradually defined and specialised, reaching its climax in Castiglione's elaborate dialogue on the training of *The Courtier*,

[1] The very tone and colour of its gayer aspect are given by Boccaccio in the stately language of his Introduction: "Io giudicherei ottimamente fatto che noi, . . . fuggendo come la morte i disonesti esempli degli altri, onestamente a' nostri luoghi in contado, de' quali a ciascuna di noi è gran copia, ce ne andassimo a stare: e quivi quella festa, quella allegrezza, quello piacere che noi potessimo, senza trapassare in alcuno atto il segno della ragione, prendessimo."

certainly one of the richest fruits of the Italian genius. The art came over seas to England with the rest of the Renaissance, and soon made itself felt in literature. Lyly's *Euphues* is at the head of the new *genre*, that book, to follow the title page, "Very pleasant for all Gentlemen to reade, and most necessary to remember: wherein are contained the delights that Wyt followeth in his youth by the pleasauntnesse of Love, and the happynesse he reapeth in age, by the perfectnesse of Wisedome." *The Faerie Queene* is the flower of the school in England, with its confessed attempt "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" by uniting "the twelve private morall vertues" of Aristotle with the graces of chivalry. There is a long drop from *The Faerie Queene* to Peacham's *Compleat Gentleman* (1622), but the ideal, *ut in honore cum dignitate vivamus*, is still in view, and we are preparing for Chesterfield in such passages as this:

> There is no one thing that setteth a fairer stampe upon Nobility than evennesse of Carriage, and care of our Reputation, without which our most gracefull gifts are dead and dull, as the Diamond without his foile; for hereupon as on the frontispice of a magnificent Pallace, are fixed the eyes of all passengers, and hereby the height of our Iudgements (even our selves) is taken.

The Civil War left scant leisure or appetite for discoursing on delicate points of conduct, and the Restoration brought back with it all the

froth of France without the substance. It remained for the dull and boorish court of Hanover to smother vice in vulgarity, and it was nothing to Chesterfield's discredit that both George II. and Caroline feared and detested him; indeed, his passionate pleading for refinement of manners may best be understood by reading Hervey's record of the family doings at St. James's and Hampton Court.

These Letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son, then, are to be taken as a part, and perhaps the most valuable part, of that literature of Courtesy which began at the first dawn of the Renaissance. But it must not be supposed that in cultivating the art of life he meant to belittle the need of a substantial foundation. On the contrary, their whole aim was to prepare the boy for an efficient career as a statesman, not without the spur of generous service to his country. They insist upon strenuous study, although my Lord would avoid the pedantry of the universities; they declare again and again that nothing can be accomplished without application and that habit of attention which is as much the lesson of the world as of the closet. The first letter of the collection, written in French to the lad when he was only seven years old, is a disquisition in little on the necessity of cultivating eloquence, ending with the observation: "*Nascitur Poeta, fit Orator:* c'est-à-dire, qu'il faut être né avec une certaine force et vivacité d'esprit pour être Poète; mais

que l'attention, la lecture, et le travail suffisent pour faire un Orateur." In other words, the young Stanhope was already destined for Parliament. Nor is morality, as the writer understood it, neglected; he was earnest in trying to set the boy *à l'abri des grands écueils de la jeunesse*, and was not ashamed to warn him from the evils of gambling by his own example; for play, he had to admit, had been his one ruling and wasteful passion.

But it is true that toward the end these precepts become rather implicit in the letters than openly taught, and that the *fortiter in re* appears to be forgotten too often in the *suaviter in modo;* the end is swallowed up in the means. It happened that the young man developed a disposition studious and serious to excess, with little care for the graces, so that his Mentor felt obliged to lay special emphasis on all this side of education. The basis of Chesterfield's theory and something of his insight into the workings of human nature can be seen from a few quotations taken somewhat at random:

> I would wish you to be a Corinthian edifice, upon a Tuscan foundation; the latter having the utmost strength and solidity to support, and the former all possible ornaments to decorate.

> A proper secrecy is the only mystery of able men; mystery is the only secrecy of weak and cunning ones.

> A man of the world must, like the chameleon, be able to take every different hue; which is by no means a

criminal or abject, but a necessary complaisance, for it relates only to manners and not to morals.

Smooth your way to the head through the heart. The way of reason is a good one; but it is commonly something longer, and perhaps not so sure.

Knowledge may give weight, but accomplishments only give lustre; and many more people see than weigh.

Never seem wiser, nor more learned, than the people you are with. Wear your learning, like your watch, in a private pocket; and do not pull it out and strike it, merely to show that you have one.

It is hard to say which is the greater fool, he who tells the whole truth or he who tells no truth at all. Character is as necessary in business affairs as in trade. No man can deceive often in either.

Have a real reserve with almost everybody, and have a seeming reserve with almost nobody; for it is very disagreeable to seem reserved, and very dangerous not to be so.

Good-breeding carries along with it a dignity that is respected by the most petulant. Ill breeding invites and authorises the familiarity of the most timid.

When a man of sense happens to be in that disagreeable situation, in which he is obliged to ask himself more than once, *What shall I do?* he will answer himself, Nothing. When his reason points out to him no good way, or at least no way less bad than another, he will stop short and wait for light. A little, busy mind runs on at all events, must be doing; and, like a blind horse, fears no dangers, because he sees none.

If a fool knows a secret, he tells it because he is a

fool ; if a knave knows one, he tells it wherever it is his interest to tell it.

Distrust all those who love you extremely upon a very slight acquaintance, and without any visible reason. Be upon your guard, too, against those who confess, as their weaknesses, all the cardinal virtues.

I have often thought, and still think, that there are few things which people in general know less, than how to love and how to hate. They hurt those they love, by a mistaken indulgence—by a blindness, nay, often a partiality to their faults. Where they hate, they hurt themselves, by ill-timed passion and rage.

Remember, there are but two *procédés* in the world for a gentleman and a man of parts : either extreme politeness or knocking down.

Whoever is in a hurry shows that the thing he is about is too big for him. Haste and hurry are very different things.

I, who have been behind the scenes, both of pleasure and business, and have seen all the springs and pullies of those decorations which astonish and dazzle the audience, retire, not only without regret, but with contentment and satisfaction. But what I do, and ever shall, regret, is the time which, while young, I lost in mere idleness and in doing nothing. . . . Do not imagine that by the employment of time I mean an uninterrupted application to serious studies. No ; pleasures are, at proper times, both as necessary and as useful ; they fashion and form you for the world ; they teach you characters, and show you the human heart in its unguarded minutes. But then remember to make use of them. I have known many people, from laziness of mind, go through both pleasure and business with equal inattention ; neither enjoying the one nor doing the other ; think-

ing themselves men of pleasure because they were mingled with those who were, and men of business because they had business to do, though they did not do it. Whatever you do, do it to the purpose ; do it thoroughly, not superficially. *Approfondissez :* go to the bottom of things.

The sure characteristic of a sound and strong mind is to find in everything those certain bounds, *quos ultra citrave nequit consistere rectum.* These boundaries are marked out by a very fine line, which only good sense and attention can discover ; it is much too fine for vulgar eyes. In manners, this line is good breeding ; beyond it, is troublesome ceremony ; short of it, is unbecoming negligence and inattention. In morals, it divides ostentatious puritanism from criminal relaxation ; in religion, superstition from impiety ; and, in short, every virtue from its kindred vice or weakness.

Good-breeding, and good-nature, do incline us rather to help and raise people up to ourselves, than to mortify and depress them ; and, in truth, our private interest concurs in it, as it is making ourselves so many friends, instead of so many enemies.

Having mentioned laughing, I must particularly warn you against it ; and I could heartily wish that you may often be seen to smile, but never heard to laugh while you live.

There is nothing reprehensible in all this, and Chesterfield's insistence on the minutest points of good-breeding—an insistence which cannot be conveyed to the reader by particular quotations—can be censured only when it is coupled with the cynical distrust of human nature which he learned from Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère and from

living society. Undoubtedly his instruction sometimes leads to the conclusion that men are either knaves or fools, either deceiving or deceived by means of the mere semblance of things. The art of living has thus, despite his protests to the contrary, an ugly tendency to transform itself into a masque of imposture. His second great maxim, *volto sciolto e pensieri stretti*, is at times not far removed from Machiavelli's system of moral strategy, or, if we wish to remain within Great Britain, from such an adaptation of the system as this by Francis Bacon: "Have openness in fame and repute, secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use, and a power to feign if there be no remedy; mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver which may make the metal work better." The most notorious and most unpardonable lapses of this kind in Chesterfield occur when he touches on the relation to women. At times he lays himself open to Wesley's charge that he taught pure debauchery, yet his worst immorality is not so repulsive as the cynicism which he adopts frankly as a part of his system. What is to be said of such a passage as this?—

> As women are a considerable, or at least a pretty numerous part, of company; and as their suffrages go a great way towards establishing a man's character in the fashionable part of the world (which is of great importance to the fortune and figure he proposes to make in it), it is necessary to please them. I will, therefore, upon this subject, let you into certain *arcana*, that will be

very useful for you to know, but which you must, with the utmost care, conceal, and never seem to know. Women, then, are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle, and sometimes wit; but for solid, reasoning good-sense, I never in my life knew one that had it, or who reasoned or acted consequentially for four-and-twenty hours together. . . . A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them. . . . They love mightily to be dabbling in business (which, by the way, they always spoil); and being justly distrustful, that men in general look upon them in a trifling light, they almost adore that man, who talks more seriously to them, and who seems to consult and trust them: I say, who seems; for weak men really do, but wise men only seem to do it.

Here, I think, my Lord falls below the code of honour of his age, and fortunately for his reputation there are not many passages in which he so heartlessly makes a prey of human weaknesses. In general he rather inculcates a refined practice of gallantry, coupling with it a sort of moral prudence and fastidiousness:

The gallantry of high life, though not strictly justifiable, carries, at least, no external marks of infamy about it. Neither the heart nor the constitution is corrupted by it; neither nose nor character lost by it; manners possibly improved.

I may be excused if I do not attempt to bring together the passages in which my Lord initiates his son into these practices of "high life," although his instruction, all things considered, is not so shocking to me as perhaps it ought to be.

Love, or gallantry if you choose, was with Chesterfield only a chapter in the larger art of living—*Disce bonas artes, moneo, Romana iuventus*—and if it may seem to verge more on Ovid's *Ars Amandi* than on Petrarch's bastard Platonism (which Plato would have been the first to repudiate), it still contains the virtue of discipline and the graces of delicate choice. It may be something less than "strictly justifiable"—so far my Lord would go in apology—but we are forced to admit that the ages when life has seemed most noble and beautiful have commonly accepted this *ars amandi* as a necessary part of their code, and that a denial of the code has too often meant (as some would think it means to-day) a retention of their vice with a loss of their grace.

At least the lessons of Chesterfield were the practice of society in his day, if not in all days, and in the end our indignation reduces itself to Walpole's disgust at seeing the frailty of mankind clothed in high authority. There is an inevitable injustice in writing about Chesterfield, for the more questionable side of his morality somehow assumes an importance out of all proportion to its real place. Only long familiarity with his Letters can acquaint one with their better wisdom and their brave and unfailing acceptance of human conditions. It is depressingly easy to lay bare the snares to virtue they contain, whereas only here and there will any reader clearly apprehend and make his own that supreme art of living of

which they are the last and most honest exhibition. We shall do well to take leave of him in a few words from the *World*, in which he shows the better and more genuine side of his system:

> To sacrifice one's own self-love to other people's, is a short, but I believe, a true definition of civility: to do it with ease, propriety, and grace is good-breeding. The one is the result of good nature; the other of good sense, joined to experience, observation, and attention.

His letters may be said to present the Sir Charles Grandison of life as it is really lived.

SIR HENRY WOTTON

FEW men have been happier in their fortune with posterity than Sir Henry Wotton. Not only was he included by Izaak Walton in that band of five whose precious Lives may be called the hagiology of English literature, but he figures also in *The Compleat Angler* as a fisherman whose "learning, wit, and cheerfulness made his company to be esteemed one of the delights of mankind." And now, in these latest days, his Life has been again written and his Letters edited with rare erudition and still rarer taste.[1] To most readers the first feeling on taking up Mr. Pearsall Smith's two volumes will be an uneasiness lest the self-revelation of the courtier in his letters may shatter the image formed by Walton's eulogy, but such a fear is soon dispelled. Here is the Wotton we have always known, with perhaps some change of emphasis from the peaceful consummation to the busy diversity of his life, but still the same stately gentleman, walking with sweet composure through the spacious world of Elizabeth and James. And to his slender poetical reputation as the author of

[1] *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton.* By Logan Pearsall Smith. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. 1907.

two or three treasured lyrics must now be added the honour of standing first, and not least, in the long line of great English letter-writers. Something of his epistolary grace was already guessed from Walton's *Reliquiæ Wottonianæ* and from other scattered sources, but it is not too much to say that the five hundred letters brought together by Mr. Pearsall Smith from his enormous correspondence, many of them here printed for the first time, stir us with the delightful shock of discovery.

Too much, of course, must not be expected from a letter-writer of that day. He affords little of the nimble, light-heeled entertainment of James Howell, who as a young traveller received favours of "my Lord Ambassador Wotton" at Venice, and as a writer has been raised to a somewhat factitious eminence by Thackeray. He lacks, it need scarcely be added, the elusive cross-lights of thought and emotion, the intimate self-searchings, and the homely confidences that entice us to more modern correspondents. He is often—and this is hardest to condone—exasperatingly blind to the interests of the future. Thus on 2 July, 1613, Wotton wrote to Sir Edmund Bacon (nephew of Lord Verulam and husband of Wotton's niece), telling of the fire which three days before had consumed the Globe Theatre while *Henry VIII.*, or an adaptation of it, was acting. It is a hasty brief note, to be sure, yet the writer has time to crack his jokes on the "only one man" who

"had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with bottle ale," and to fling his gibe at plays "sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous" — he has time for this, yet never names the writer of that play whom, sitting at ease perhaps with Essex and Southampton, he must often have seen on the stage, "a motley to the view," and of whom he might have heard so much, and such strange things, from the younger man when in 1599 he and Southampton accompanied Essex on the ill-fated Irish expedition. How much we would spare in these letters for a glimpse of Shakespeare playing his part in the Globe Theatre or making court to his supercilious patrons! It may be unfair to ask of Wotton what no one else of his age condescended to give us, but it is just the prerogative of genius to forestall the concern of future times.

However, if Wotton missed the prophetic instinct of genius and the spontaneous dexterity of wit, he had brave qualities to compensate. His language may occasionally move a little slowly for our taste, but it is always courtly and refined, while now and then there breaks through his reserve that note of piercing beauty which only the Elizabethans could utter at random. In June of 1615 Wotton, then at The Hague and exasperated with long and futile diplomatic business, is again writing to his dearest friend Sir

Edmund Bacon; and his letter is so short and so comprehensive withal that it may be copied in full:

SIR,

I hear a little voice that you are come to London, which to me is the voice of a nightingale; for since I cannot enjoy your presence, I make myself happy with your nearness; and yet now, methinks, I have a kind of rebellion against it, that we should be separated with such a contemptible distance. For how much I love you, mine own heart doth know; and God knoweth my heart. But let me fall into a passion: for what sin, in the name of Christ, was I sent hither among soldiers, being by my profession academical, and by my charge pacifical? I am within a day or two to send Cuthberd my servant home, by whom I shall tell you divers things. In the meanwhile, I have adventured these few lines, to break the ice of silence; for in truth, it is a cold fault. Our sweet Saviour bless you.

Servidore,

ARRIGO WOTTONI.

My hot love to the best niece of the world.

The note may be pitched a degree above his wont, yet it is not beyond the compass of that "passionate plainness" which he himself made the mark of his writing. And here in little space the character of the whole man stands outlined before the eye: here are intimated the warmth of his family ties and friendships, his love of things Italian which made him the highest type of the "Italianate Englishman," his scholarly taste, his union of the diplomat and the uncompromised

spectator, his religious earnestness, and his craving for quiet. Were it not fantastic, we might liken this miniature shadow of his life to Kepler's newly-invented *camera obscura* which he saw at Vienna and described in a letter to the great Bacon. To fill out the details of that picture is impossible, and unnecessary, within the scope of an essay; even to name all his distinguished friends would carry us too far. In England there was the large circle of his family, Wottons and Bacons, Mortons, Throckmortons, and Finches, many of whom are remembered in history as well as in his letters. With James I. he corresponded directly, prince and subject being evidently drawn together by certain tastes in common; to Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, he wrote both as a diplomatic agent and as a friend; he served the overweening Essex, in whose downfall he was almost involved. These are a few of the great names connected with his at home; and abroad his travels, undertaken first to complete his education, were but a continuation of the noble art of friendship.

As for education, that may be called the business of his whole life. It began with the happy influences attending his birth, in 1568, at the family home in Kent, "an ancient and goodly structure, beautifying and being beautified by the parish church of Bocton Malherbe adjoining unto it, and both seated within a fair park of the Wottons, on the brow of such a hill as gives

the advantage of a large prospect, and of equal pleasure to all beholders"; and with the traditions of a family who accepted or refused the baits of the great world with a proud independence. His grandfather rejected the office of Lord Chancellor from the hands of Henry VIII., and his great uncle, a man who loved quietness though very wise, as William Cecil described him, might have been Archbishop of Canterbury under Elizabeth, had he so chosen. His father, according to Walton, was also "a man of great modesty, of a most plain and single heart, and of ancient freedom and integrity of mind." From such a home and family the boy Henry went to the school at Winchester. Of his doings there nothing is known save what Izaak Walton reports from the old man's recollections. "How useful," said Wotton to a travelling-companion the summer before his death, "was that advice of a holy monk, who persuaded his friend to perform his customary devotions in a constant place, because in that place we usually meet with those very thoughts which possessed us at our last being there. And I find it thus far experimentally true, that, at my being in that school, and seeing that very place where I sate when I was a boy, occasioned me to remember those very thoughts of my youth which then possessed me: sweet thoughts indeed, that promised my growing years numerous pleasures, without mixtures of cares. . . . But age and experience have taught me that

those were but empty hopes; for I have always found it true, as my Saviour did foretell, Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Nevertheless, I saw there a succession of boys using the same recreations, and, questionless, possessed with the same thoughts that then possessed me. Thus one generation succeeds another, both in their lives, recreations, hopes, fears, and death."—Was the "holy monk" Wotton's Venetian friend Paolo Sarpi? and did Gray have this passage in mind when he wrote his Eton ode?

At the age of sixteen (1584) Wotton proceeded to Oxford, where he stayed four years, adding to his circle of acquaintance the poet John Donne and the Italian professor of civil law Alberico Gentili. After the university came the grand tour. Here his letters begin with his going abroad, in 1589, and until his return, in 1594, are filled with flitting glimpses of student life at Heidelberg, Vienna, Geneva, and other cities of the North, and with the adventures of a Protestant Englishman travelling disguised as a German through the states of Italy—"a paradise inhabited with devils," he calls the land. Now it is the difficulty of getting copies of forbidden books he relates, again he describes some famous library; but always he is in search of friends among the notable scholars where he visits: "My most good and kind mother," he wrote from Altdorf, "let no cares taken for your sons be cause of less comfortable thoughts unto you. . . . It is knowledge

I seek, and to live in the seeking of that is my only pleasure." The best-known of his scholastic friendships was with Casaubon, with whom he lodged for fourteen months at Geneva. "Ah, what days those were," exclaimed the older man years afterwards, "when heedless of the lateness of the hour we passed whole nights in lettered talk! I hanging on your stories of all you had seen of many men and many lands [this was at the end of Wotton's wanderings]; you pleased to hear somewhat of my desultory readings. Oh! that was life worth living! pure happiness! I cannot recall those times without groaning in spirit." — Coryat and Fines Moryson reported the meeting of famous scholars in their Continental tours, but their acquaintance was not of this stamp. Nor, at a later date, have the memoranda of John Evelyn's inveterate curiosity for celebrities the grace of these familiar letters.

When in after years Wotton travelled as the accredited representative of the King, he naturally made friendships of another sort. Yet his drawing to Sarpi at Venice was as much for the friar's vast erudition as for his influence in the rebellion of the city against the Pope. He nowhere draws a more finished character than that in his letters after the Frate's death; scarcely anywhere does he stop to note so minutely the dear eccentricities of a friend as when he observes the habit of the scholar, while reading or writing alone, "to sit fenced with a castle of paper about his chair and

over his head, for he was of our Lord of St. Alban's opinion that all air is predatory and especially hurtful when the spirits are most employed."

For friendship or love of the other sex there is, with a single exception, no concern in these letters. To the women of his own family, his mother and sisters and nieces, he showed indeed a noble affection, and in his later years he found unfailing comfort in the society of those of them that remained. It was a niece, Philippa, wife of Sir Edmund Bacon, to whom was sent his "hot love" in the letter already quoted, and of her on her death he wrote to his bereaved friend in language almost sobbing with pain :

> Among those that have deep interest in whatsoever can befall you, I am the freshest witness of your unexpressible affections to my most dear niece ; whom God hath taken from us into His eternal light and rest, where we must leave her, till we come unto her. I should think myself unworthy for ever of that love she bore me, if in this case I were fit to comfort you.

These were the bonds of kinship, always sacred to Sir Henry ; but for women as possible disturbers of his heart he had in general, I fear, a low conceit. Only once, apparently, does he hint at marriage for himself, and that is when, after complaining of his incompetent fortune, he adds coolly : "Peradventure I may light upon a widow that will take pity of me." His observations on woman in the Table Talk, now first printed by

Mr. Pearsall Smith, are even less romantic, where they are not too plain-spoken to be repeated. "Next to no wife and children," he says, "your own wife and children are best pastime; another's wife and your children worse; your wife and another's children worst." And again: "Wit and a woman are two frail things, and both the frailer by concurring." These are the sentiments of his mature years, taken down while at Venice; they correspond well enough with the poem written "in his youth":

O faithless world, and thy most faithless part,
A woman's heart!
The true shop of variety, where sits
Nothing but fits
And fevers of desire, and pangs of love,
Which toys remove. . . .
Untrue she was; yet I believed her eyes,
Instructed spies,
Till I was taught, that love was but a school
To breed a fool. . . .
Excuse no more thy folly; but, for cure,
Blush and endure
As well thy shame as passions that were vain;
And think, 't is gain,
To know that love lodged in a woman's breast,
Is but a guest.

This is not the cynicism of the voluptuary, for, despite the scandalous anecdote told by Ben Jonson to Drummond—with what hearty glee one can imagine—it should appear that Wotton, like another Milton and with less necessity of

protesting his innocence than the prying Coryat, carried with him on his travels the Puritanic notion of chastity. On his first setting out he writes to his brother that, if any of his friends had conceived a loose humour in him, they should correct it for an error, and be assured he can teach his soul "to run against the delights of fond youth." And to his mother about the same time he sends his rule of conduct: "The point I study daily is to converse with all sorts, and yet in mine own manner and conscience." Nor does his distrust ring like a mere echo of the age's affectation, caught up from the classical *mutabile semper* and a long succession of mediæval writers; the note is too personal for that and might rather suggest some early disappointment as its first source. It is, I think, the cynicism born of mingled ignorance and idealism—if these two words, in such human relations, do not connote the same thing. That Wotton remained all his life at bottom ignorant of the individual woman's character may be inferred from his blundering attempt to frighten Lady Arundel from Venice by reporting rumours of her intended arrest. Wofully he misread that imperious lady's temper, and of all his diplomatic mishaps none proved more humiliating than this. And with this ignorance went a distrust of any passions that might break down the philosophic independence which he sought as the ideal of life, and might subject him *to serve another's will*. Women to such men the world

over have been more the projection of their own emotions than individual entities, and have been dreaded as a symbol of our subjugation to the fickle body. Only remoteness of position can bring liberty from this uneasiness, by raising the woman herself into an image of detachment from the earth. And one such vision passed through the life of our philosophic diplomat.

In 1613, Elizabeth, the daughter of James I., had been married at London to the Elector Palatine and had gone to reside at Heidelberg. Her secretary and English agent was Albertus Morton, one of Sir Henry's nephews. Wotton may well have met the princess at her father's court, and felt the charm of her winsome beauty, perhaps observed the prophetic mark that superstition or an instinct of destiny loves to set on graces doomed to adversity. At any rate, when travelling to Venice on his second embassy, he stopped at Heidelberg long enough to become the trusted friend of the Electress and to hear the difficulties of her life. And again, on his way thither for his third embassy he was commissioned to stop at Vienna and take a hand in straightening out the Bohemian tangle. Of that wretched embroglio this is no place to speak at length. In 1619 the Elector Palatine had been elected to the throne of Bohemia, which had been made vacant by the summary process of "defenestration." The new emperor Ferdinand, however, immediately laid claim to that crown, and

took it, not only depriving the Palsgrave and his wife of their royal honours but ejecting them from the Palatinate as well. Wotton was scarcely the man to stay the Emperor's hand, especially when he received a wavering support from home; but before setting out on his vain errand, "being in Greenwitch Parke," as a letter of the day explicitly notes, he composed the lovely "sonnet" to the Queen, which has made his fame as a poet, if not as a man of business:

You meaner beauties of the Night,
That poorly satisfy our eyes,
More by your numbers than your light,
You common people of the skies;
What are you when the Moon shall rise?

You curious chanters of the Wood,
That warble forth dame Nature's lays,
Thinking your passions understood
By your weak accents; what 's your praise
When Philomel her voice shall raise?

You violets that first appear,
By your pure purple mantle known,
Like the proud virgins of the year,
As if the Spring were all your own;
What are you when the Rose is blown?

So when my Mistress shall be seen
In form and beauty of her mind,
By Virtue first, then choice a Queen,
Tell me if she were not design'd
Th' eclipse and glory of her kind?

Queen and not Queen she was, chosen and re-

jected. Of her subsequent adventures and of her mock court at The Hague, where she drew about her such friends as Descartes, there is much to read in the annals of the day. Wotton was not the only gentleman who worshipped loyally this unfortunate lady called, as Howell notes, "the Queen of Bohemia and for her winning, princely comportment the Queen of Hearts"; there were these foolish Jacobites long before that word became current politically, and it is one of the contemptuous ironies of fate that she should have been the grandmother of George I. But of her admirers Wotton alone was able to express the poetry of devotion in his letters. In 1628, on the death of one who had served faithfully both the Queen and himself, he sends the famous epigram, really his own, to a correspondent at The Hague:

If the Queen have not heard the epitaph of Albertus Morton and his lady, it is worth her hearing for the passionate plainness:

> He first deceased. She for a little tried
> To live without him: liked it not and died.
> *Authoris Incerti.*

And on the same day he directed to that "most resplendent Queen, even in the darkness of fortune," a letter which, as it is preserved to us, begins abruptly:

Yet my mind and my spirits give me, against all the combustions of the world, that before I die I shall kiss

again your royal hand, in as merry an hour as when I last had the honour to wait upon your gracious eyes at Heidelberg.

Wotton did not die for eleven years after that, while Elizabeth lived on through all the combustions of the Civil War, but he never again saw those gracious eyes or kissed that "most sweet and gracious hand."

I have dwelt at length on this episode in his life because in some respects it shows more of the real man than the diplomatic events which occupy the larger part of his correspondence. Besides his lesser missions, such as his visits to Turin to forward the much-desired Savoy match, his embassy to The Hague during the tangled Juliers-Cleves controversy, and his fool's errand to Heidelberg and Vienna in the Bohemian quarrel, which brought him only disappointment and chagrin save for that flower of the Queen's friendship,—besides these missions which, as much by the fault of the King as of himself, were all fruitless, he was three times resident ambassador to the Republic of Venice (1604–1610, 1616–1619, 1621–1623), and there is really more of Italian than of English history in his life. I cannot quite agree with Mr. Pearsall Smith in holding the letters from the Adriatic so much the most interesting of the collection, for Wotton, to my thinking, is never more amusing than when stirred to petulance by such barren intrigues as those at Vienna. Yet this is not to deny the

great value of the Italian letters historically or to underrate their pictorial and human qualities. Other English travellers of the time have left their record of "that most glorious, renowned, and virgin city of Venice," "a place where there is nothing wanting that heart can wish," and have lauded her "incomparable and most decantated majesty"; but none knew the inmost wheels of her machinery as Wotton knew them, and none wrote so fully of her splendours and her embarrassments. With the help of Mr. Pearsall Smith's notes one may almost feel oneself present at those audiences of the *Collegio*, where the perplexed and scolding politics of Europe were reduced to the stately harangue and reply of Venetian eloquence. And in this city Wotton found opportunity for the single international question that engaged his whole heart. Political differences had brought Venice into open conflict with the Pope; for a while she defied the Roman excommunication and was on the verge of throwing herself into the arms of the Reformation. Sarpi, the greatest Italian of the age, indefatigable scholar and inflexible moralist, governed from his cell the religious policy of the city, and Wotton, the only living person to whom it is known that he confided his authorship of "The Council of Trent," lived in daily hope of his complete conversion to Protestantism. Here was room for all the ardour and diligence of Wotton's religious nature. Shiploads of King James's controversial

books, in whose efficacy Wotton avowed a naïve or courtly trust, were imported for distribution in Venice; plans were laid and measures, futile in the end, were actually taken to establish a Protestant college on the borders of Italy, which should offset the Jesuit Propaganda and withdraw the Pope "from troubling of other kingdoms to help himself in the bowels of Italy"; and various other movements were set afoot, all of which are narrated—and their importance in some cases scarcely exaggerated—in the ambassador's bulletins to the King and to the Secretaries of State.

And if Wotton failed in this high design, it was owing to the irresistible current of history, and not to that half-heartedness which, as one suspects, he carried into most of his other diplomatic undertakings. For it becomes clear that he was a man out of place in the world of intrigue, and this, rather than any tendency to double-dealing on his part, was probably the cause of the suspicions he aroused in some of those who were playing the game in earnest; they could not understand his motives. This is not to say that Wotton was altogether above, or even unskilled in, the underground arts that formed the chief occupation of these international agents. He appears to have been particularly dexterous in the detective service—then officially recognised—of spying on individuals and intercepting letters, and his palace was a meeting-place

for *bravi* and informers of all sorts. If any excuse for such practices were needed beyond the universal custom of the day, Wotton would have found it in the need of meeting his enemies with their own weapons:

> I do first give your Lordship very humble thanks [he writes to Salisbury] for the expediting of my extraordinary allowances at £200 a quarter; though with just protestation that I shall be a loser by it, for I have laid at the chargeablest, so the best, means and ways of the world to furnish his Majesty with the knowledge of the secretest practices out of the very packets of the Jesuits themselves, and herein the seat of this town (fit for interception) doth somewhat advantage me; and mine own zeal, not to be altogether unfruitful, hath made me likewise bestow some instruments in other places that are places of passage. So as for that money which I spend of his Majesty's abroad, I presume, according to the measure of my understanding, that I shall tender him at least an accompt of my honest industry: *I call that honest which tendeth to the discovery of such as are not so, by what means soever, while I am upon the present occupation.*

Few diplomatic agents of the age would have felt any need of adding such an apology — *est quidam usus mendaciorum.* And if it is unpleasant to learn that Wotton's conscience was elastic enough to listen to the suggestions of an anonymous cutthroat who offered to send Tyrone *a casa del Diavolo*, we must remember that he is not ashamed to relate the affair to the King of England and that the life of such an exile

as this Irish leader was nowhere held sacred.

On the whole Wotton was remarkable for his honesty both in word and deed. Once or twice he may have received pensions from others than the master he represented, but never to that master's detriment, and more than once he refused with indignation money that most of his contemporaries would have pocketed. "I must tell you I am a poor gentleman," he said to one who held out a bribe, "but bred among the noble arts, not venal, no traitor, and I would advise you to leave my house and never to return nor to venture to speak to any of my people." He only regretted that he had not instantly drawn upon the tempter. A poor man for his position he remained all his life, and his latter days were troubled by efforts to wring from Government back payments due him, and to satisfy his own creditors who on one occasion went so far as to imprison him for debt. Nor was he, in smaller affairs at least, inefficient. From Venice he obtained many valuable concessions touching men and commercial regulations; while at home he was able to keep the volatile mind of James amused with the current wit of Italy, and to maintain himself in favour by a flattery superlatively adroit but never fawning. Thus, when at The Hague in 1614, he was, wrongly it appears, accused of having caused the loss of Wesel by dilatory advice, his apology to the King, with its play on James's various foibles, is as shrewd

a document as has often been sent home by a suspected minister:

> First, I was bound unto your Majesty for this particular advertisement, for though I had heard before of some such voice bestowed upon me, yet I could gather it to no head. Next, I yield your Majesty most humble thanks for the reservation of your belief, which I receive as an argument of your favour towards me, though it be a piece of your own usual and natural equity. As for the matter itself, I conceive one special comfort in it, that they who told your Majesty how Wesel was lost by my securing of the States, would perchance likewise have said that I sold the town to the Archdukes, if my honesty had been as questionable as my discretion. But these and the like aspersions are the proper badges of public servants, especially in democratical regiments [governments]; whereof both reason and examples might easily be given, if it did not more concern me at the present to rectify my poor estimation with your Majesty, than to search the nature of the place. . . .

But withal Wotton cannot be reckoned among the successful diplomats. It is perfectly clear that the *menudencias* of his business were continually irksome to him, and that he felt, and at times even expressed, something of impatient contempt for the political contest in which these trivialities were the approved weapons. Like Chesterfield in the next century his heart was not in the game; he belonged to that class of men who are more concerned with their decorous progress through the pageantry and comedy of life than with the issues that are dividing the passions of

others. He himself was certainly aware of this aloofness, as we may conjecture his companions were also aware of it. Not modesty alone but some touch of the gentleman's vanity led him to say that all he had observed in his employments was a few maxims of State too high for his capacity, and too subtle for his nature, which was cast in a plainer mould; and there is the same proud resignation in his later words to an unknown friend: "Nemo te melius novit quantulum legati valeant in turbatis temporibus." One gets the impression that, except where questions of religion entered, he moved through the scenes of diplomacy and politics more as an amused spectator than as a participant. He was for a while a member of the House of Commons, and this is the report of that office he sends to his nephew:

> It is both morally and naturally true, that I have never been in perfect health and cheerfulness since we parted; but I have entertained my mind, when my body would give me leave, with the contemplation of the strangest thing that ever I beheld, commonly called in our language (as I take it) a Parliament.

That was the so-called "addled Parliament" in which the growing distraction of the age vented itself in sound and fury, prophetic of furious deeds to come. Thomas Wentworth, afterwards the great Strafford, and John Eliot took part in that brief, stormy session of 1614; can one im-

agine either of these men entertaining his mind with the contemplation of this strangest thing? Or, to return to Wotton's more regular employment as a diplomat, read through his letters from The Hague during the Juliers-Cleves embroglio. "We are now in travail," he writes at a critical moment, "and find more difficulty in the humours than in the things"; it is clear throughout all his record here of talking ambassadors and marching soldiers that the humours of men and the comedy of the intrigue are what really pique his curiosity.

Most significant of all for understanding his temperament is that famous *mot* by which he is still popularly remembered. On his way to Venice in 1604, to take charge of his first embassy, he passed through Augsburg, where in the album of a friend he inscribed his full name and office: *Henricus Wotonius, Serenissimi Angliæ, Scotiæ, Franciæ, et Hiberniæ Regis Orator primus ad Venetos*, with this extraordinary motto: *Legatus est Vir bonus, peregrè missus ad mentiendum Reipub. causa.* As Mr. Pearsall Smith observes, the Latin, missing the pun of the English: "An ambassador is an honest man sent to *lie* abroad for the good of his country," suggests that Wotton merely translated the witticism for the occasion; it may well have been an old joke with him. Nothing, however, came of the indiscretion until 1611, when Scioppius, ribald and scurrilous beyond the license of the times, raked it up for

his *Ecclesiasticus*, an attack on the religion and morals of James I. Who could trust a king, he exclaimed in a fine indignation, that sent his ministers abroad to disseminate lies? And as for Wotton himself, he was like the wicked man of the proverb: "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief." Wotton defended himself in a public letter by showing that the words were manifestly a mere idle jest among friends, but his royal master was incensed, and for a year the jester was out of favour with King and court. As a matter of fact he was probably, for his trade and his generation, too little skilled in lying. It was he who in his old age, to one about to commence ambassador, as Walton relates and as Bismarck was in our day to recall, "smilingly gave this for an infallible aphorism, that, to be in safety himself, and serviceable to his country, he should always and upon all occasions speak the truth (it seems a State paradox), for . . . you shall never be believed." But if no one now would think seriously of impeaching his morality, we may observe a ticklish note of irony in both his witticisms more becoming the disinterested gentleman than one walking on the slippery stones of statecraft. In the haven of Eton, "where he was freed from all corroding cares, and seated on such a rock as the waves of want could not probably shake," he might safely in his old age, as Walton says, quoting Sir William Davenant,

Laugh at the graver business of the State,
Which speaks men rather wise than fortunate;

but it can scarcely be doubted that his wit, while making him for the most part agreeable personally to James, really shut him out from political confidence and kept him discontented. Even at Venice, where he found not only the comedy of characters to amuse him and the splendours of art with the no less splendid pageantry of life to delight his eye, but also the deeper problems of religion to engage his heart, he could write to a friend despondingly: "When I consider how all those of my rank have been dignified and benefited at home, while I have been gathering of cockles upon this lake, I am in good faith impatient, more of the shame, than of the sense of want." And after leaving Venice finally he likened himself to "those seal-fishes, which sometimes, as they say, oversleeping themselves in an ebbing-water, feel nothing about them but a dry shore when they awake."

But there was something more in Wotton than this *felix curiositas* which kept him rather wise than fortunate. Within his breast were wells of unruffled contemplation, the inheritance we may suppose of his Kentish ancestors, and along with that restless interest in the spectacle of life, so common in Elizabethan and Jacobean days, there went the no less characteristic dallying with the seductions of repose. It was probably in 1612,

his year of disgrace after the exposure of Scioppius, that he wrote the bravest of his protests against the world, that immortal *Character of a Happy Life:*

How happy is he born and taught,
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill;

Whose passions not his masters are;
Whose soul is still prepared for death,
Untied unto the world by care
Of public fame or private breath;

Who envies none that chance doth raise,
Nor vice; who never understood
How deepest wounds are given by praise;
Nor rules of state, but rules of good;

Who hath his life from rumours freed;
Whose conscience is his strong retreat;
Whose state can neither flatterers feed,
Nor ruin make oppressors great;

Who God doth late and early pray
More of his grace than gifts to lend;
And entertains the harmless day
With a religious book, or friend.

This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall:
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And, having nothing, yet hath all.

It is a note struck many times before Sir Henry Wotton's day and caught up from him by in-

numerable poets since then. While reading that poem one thinks of what is perhaps the latest echo of it in our own age, the defiant lines of W. E. Henley:

> Beyond this place of wrath and tears
> Looms but the Horror of the shade,
> And yet the menace of the years
> Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
>
> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul.

Whose passions not his masters are! By the side of that calm strength and that clear-eyed submission to providence is it too much to say that this tortured challenge is but a poor bit of fanfaronade after all? Defiance is a passion like another, even a tawdry and insubstantial thing for the most part, and in this rebellious cry against fate a man may forget that he is still a slave to his own ignoble self. It was not in such a spirit that the Elizabethan prayed to be *Lord of himself*, but in the large humility of self-knowledge, wherewith by comparison the romantic revolt of modern song is but a feverish tossing within the bondage of egotism.

For it must not be supposed that the true source of Wotton's poem was any pique at his temporary disgrace with fortune and men's eyes; rather it came from that self-recollection which

he carried with him through all the contrarieties of life's game. Nor should we forget how common was this spirit in those days. Before Wotton had come to the age of reflection, Thomas Lord Vaux had written of contentment:

> When all is done and said,
> In the end thus shall you find,
> He most of all doth bathe in bliss
> That hath a quiet mind;

and Wotton differed from many of his contemporaries chiefly in this, that the years gave him at last what they sighed for but never attained, or, attaining, threw away. He at least might have said with truth:

> I can be well content
> The sweetest time of all my life
> To deem in thinking spent.

That sweetest time came to him when, in 1624, as a recognition of his scholarship and character and partly perhaps as an offset for public moneys due him, he was appointed Provost of Eton College, in which little world he lived and ruled until his death fifteen years later.

If any connection be sought between his diplomatic and academic careers it may be found in the inscription for the painting of Venice by Fialetti which still stands in the Provost's large dining hall: "*Henricus Wottonius, post tres apud Venetos legationes ordinarias, in Etonensis Collegii*

beato sinu senescens, eiusque, cum suavissima inter se sociosque concordia, annos iam 12 præfectus, hanc miram urbis quasi natantis effigiem in aliquam sui memoriam iuxta socialem mensam affixit. 1636." The world, it need not be said, was not entirely cut off from him in the happy bosom of his college. One of his most beautiful letters was sent thence, with a book on fish-ponds which had been promised at Medley's, the fashionable "ordinary" in Milford Lane, to Sir Thomas Wentworth, in 1628:

. . . Sorry I am not to be at London, when my noblest friends are there. And yet what should I, that am of so small influence, do at those great conjunctions? We poor cloistered men are best in our own cells; *quædam plantæ*, saith Pliny, *gaudent umbra*. Yet there do still hang, I know not how, upon me, some relics of an hearkening humour; and if I could, in a line or two, be favoured with your judgment of the event of this Parliament, I should think myself better resolved than if I had gone to ask that question at Delphos; though I could rather wish this turned into a greater favour, and that my ever-honoured Lord Clifford, yourself, and Sir Gervas Clifton—that is, the Medley Triplicity—would at some of your playing and breathing days, take in some of this fresh air. A little interposing of philosophical diet may perchance somewhat lighten the spirits of men overcharged with public thoughts, and prevent a surfeit of state.

That *hearkening humour* was a phrase which he did not let fall without repeating in another letter; and elsewhere he confessed that, having

spent so much of his age "among noise abroad and seven years thereof in the Court at home," he was still subject to "a certain concupiscence of novelties."

There was the business of the college also to occupy him, not always a light matter, when men of influence importunately demanded scholarships for their sons. Discipline must be maintained, and indeed was something more than maintained according to the account of John Evelyn. "My father," writes that diarist for 1632, "would willingly have weaned me from my fondness of my too indulgent grandmother, intending to have placed me at Eton; but I was so terrified at the report of the severe discipline there, that I was sent back to Lewes, which perverseness of mine I have since a thousand times deplored." And so by a grandmother's indulgence and a boy's perversity we have missed the chance of another contemporary portrait of Provost Wotton. But still more to the master's heart than sheer discipline was, we suspect, the opportunity of working by hidden means upon the boys of finer nature. "For in this Royal Seminary," he writes, "we are in one thing, and only in one, like the Jesuits, that we all joy when we get a spirit upon whom much may be built." And not the least noble of his pupils, Sir Robert Boyle, described him as "a person that was not only a fine gentleman himself, but very well skilled in the art of making others so."

With the business of the school went also the opportunity of teaching by books. In the year of his appointment he had published *The Elements of Architecture*, an attempt to guide to noble ends the introduction of Italian art into England, and for the rest of his life various learned designs, most of which were never executed, seem to have flattered his fancy. One of these, *A Philosophical Survey of Education* (1630?), has the largeness of view we should expect from him, and is not without permanent value. Formal religion, too, had its claims upon his time. Soon after accepting the office of Provost, he entered into holy orders, though modesty and some reticence of spirit kept him from proceeding further than the degree of deacon. To the King, then Charles I., he accounted for his conduct in one of his most characteristic letters. "God knows," he exclaims, "the nearer I approach to contemplate His greatness, the more I tremble to assume any cure of souls even in the lowest degree, that were bought at so high a price. . . . This I conceive to be a piece of mine own character; so as my private study must be my theatre rather than a pulpit, and my books my auditors, as they are all my treasure." Yet his humility in things holy was not inconsistent with human pride. By his example, he thought, the sons of gentlemen and knights would "not be ashamed, after the sight of courtly weeds, to put on a surplice." For himself he had every year more need of the

secret consolations of faith. One by one the friends and relatives, with whom he had so magnificently shared his life, dropped away, yielding, as he wrote plaintively a little before his own death, "to the seigniory and sovereignty of time." While into the growing loneliness of his study there entered the rumours, rather the first dismal blasts, of the gathering political storm. "Never," he writes in April of 1639, "was there such a stamping and blending of rebellion and religion together." Happily for him he was himself within a few months beyond the noise of these drums and tramplings, out of reach of any conquest of men. How grievously he felt the contentions of the age may be known from the epitaph by order of his will engraved on his tomb:

Hic iacet huius Sententiæ primus Author.

DISPUTANDI PRURITUS FIT ECCLESIARUM SCABIES.

Nomen alias quære.

Which Walton translates: "Here lies the first author of this sentence: The itch of disputation will prove the scab of the church. Inquire his name elsewhere."

But these losses and forebodings came to him when he had himself "arrived near those years which lie in the suburbs of oblivion." For the most part his days at Eton, as we see them de-

picted in his letters, slipped by in the enjoyment of that sheltered quiet for which he had always yearned—*animas fieri sapientiores quiescendo.* And quite in accord with the letters is the ever-delightful picture Walton has left of his friend's busy peace :

And now to speak a little of the employment of his time in the College. After his customary public devotions, his use was to retire into his study and there to spend some hours in reading the Bible and authors in divinity, closing up his meditations with private prayer; this was, for the most part, his employment in the forenoon. But when he was once sate to dinner, then nothing but cheerful thoughts possessed his mind, and those still increased by constant company at his table of such persons as brought thither additions both of learning and pleasure ; but some part of most days was usually spent in philosophical conclusions. Nor did he forget his innate pleasure of angling, which he would usually call his idle time not idly spent ; saying often, he would rather live five May months than forty Decembers. . . .

He was a constant cherisher of all those youths in that school, in whom he found either a constant diligence or a genius that prompted them to learning; for whose encouragement he was (beside many other things of necessity and beauty) at the charge of setting up in it two rows of pillars, on which he caused to be choicely drawn the pictures of divers of the most famous Greek and Latin historians, poets, and orators; persuading them not to neglect rhetoric because Almighty God has left mankind affections to be wrought upon. And he would often say that none despised eloquence but such dull souls as were not capable of it. He would also often make choice of some observations out of those

historians and poets; and would never leave the school without dropping some choice Greek or Latin apothegm or sentence, that might be worthy of a room in the memory of a growing scholar.

Several meetings out of these latter days have been recorded and are among the memorable scenes of our literary history. Most celebrated of all is that day when John Milton came from Horton to pay his respects to the famous Provost of Eton and to inquire about travelling in Italy, whither the young poet was turning his thoughts. Then came a gift of *Comus* to Wotton and in reply a letter of thanks and advice. How the tried connoisseur praised in that letter the ravishing Doric delicacy of Milton's songs, every lover of Milton knows; it is not surprising that the recipient of such praise kept the document and printed it in the first volume of his collected poems. There is for us an interest of another sort in finding Wotton impart to the intending traveller the "Delphian oracle" which he had made the rule of his own life and which in another age Chesterfield was to reiterate so often to his son: *I pensieri stretti e il viso sciolto.* That day when Wotton and Milton came together is marked with white in our annals, but many readers, if such choice were granted to fancy, would almost choose rather to have been present that time that Izaak Walton sat by his courtly friend on the river's bank, as it is celebrated in *The Compleat Angler:*

And I do easily believe that peace and patience and a calm content did cohabit in the cheerful heart of Sir Henry Wotton; because I know that when he was beyond seventy years of age he made this description of a part of the present pleasure that possessed him, as he sat quietly in a summer's evening, on a bank a-fishing. It is a description of the spring, which, because it glided as soft and sweetly from his pen, as that river does at this time, by which it was then made, I shall repeat it unto you;

> This day dame Nature seem'd in love;
> The lusty sap began to move;
> Fresh juice did stir the embracing vines;
> And birds had drawn their valentines.
> The jealous trout, that low did lie,
> Rose at a well-dissembled fly;
> There stood my friend, with patient skill,
> Attending of his trembling quill. . . .

It is pleasant to leave him thus with his song unfinished and his creel unfilled, and to reflect on the full orbit of his life from the Kentish birthplace at Bocton Malherbe, through the crowded courts of many lands, to the peaceful river bank with a friend.

THE END